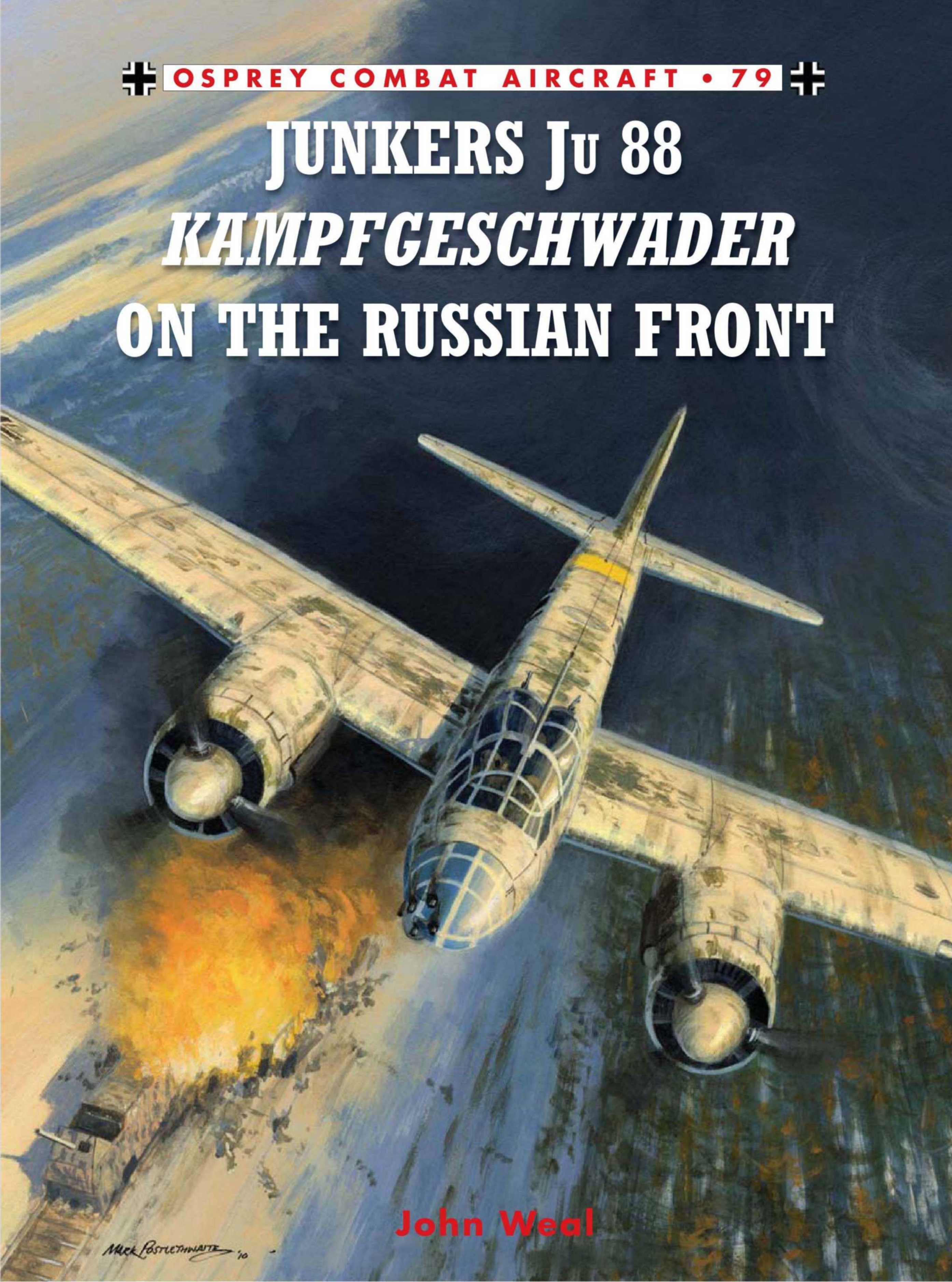
OSPREY COMBAT AIRCRAFT • 79

JUNKERS Ju 88 *KAMPFGESCHWADER* ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT


Mark Postlethwaite '10

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JOHN WEAL

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Front Cover

In the war against the Soviet Union the Ju 88 bomber was employed in two major roles. Its primary function was as a tactical strike weapon supporting Axis ground forces in the field, but it also saw a great deal of use against the enemy's rear area lines of supply and communication. These latter included road, rail and sea transport routes.

In order to increase their effectiveness against the Soviets' extensive rail network in particular, most Ju 88 *Kampfgeschwader* on the Russian front were ordered to re-equip one of their component *Staffeln* with cannon-armed Ju 88C-6 heavy fighters. And it is one such 'train-buster' – a machine of 4.(Eis)/KG 76, winter-camouflaged and with dummy transparencies painted on its solid nose to deceive enemy fighters – that provides the subject of Mark Postlethwaite's dramatic cover artwork as it attacks a Soviet armoured train on the southern sector of the front late in 1942 (*Cover artwork by Mark Postlethwaite*)

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE
BARBAROSSA – OPENING ROUND 6

CHAPTER TWO
BARBAROSSA – DECISION DEFERRED 20

CHAPTER THREE
ARCTIC CONVOYS 33

CHAPTER FOUR
STALINGRAD AND AFTER 60

APPENDICES 90
COLOUR PLATES COMMENTARY 92
INDEX 95

BARBAROSSA – OPENING ROUND

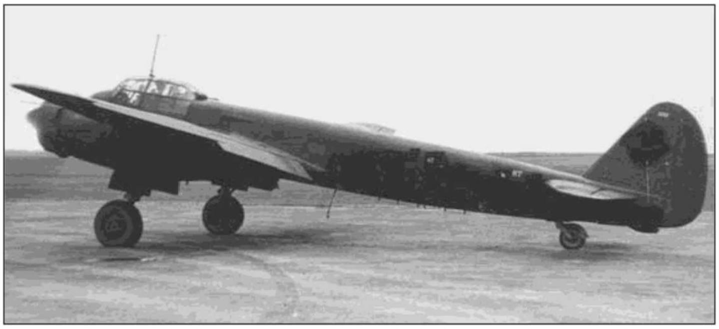
By mid May 1941 the Luftwaffe's nocturnal *Blitz* on Britain, which had begun in September 1940 and peaked with the devastating raid on London during the night of 10/11 May, was clearly starting to lose momentum. Even so, it still came as a surprise to many in the *Kampfgruppen* involved in the nightly forays over the British Isles when they were taken off operations for no discernible reason.

II./KG 1's experiences were typical. This was one of the five *Gruppen* that had been rushed to western France in late May in an abortive attempt to aid the stricken battleship *Bismarck*. But with the pride of the Kriegsmarine sent to the bottom of the Atlantic by the pursuing Royal Navy before they could intervene, the Luftwaffe's bombers were recalled to their bases in the north of France just two days later.

Back at Rosières-en-Santerre, 20 miles to the southeast of Amiens, the crews of II./KG 1 fully expected to resume their night *Blitz* on Britain. But instead they were taken off operations to undergo a thorough overhaul. III./KG 1, their sole sister *Gruppe* (I./KG 1 having been redesignated to become III./KG 40 back in March), received an even more unexpected order. They were to return to the homeland, where their Ju 88A-5s were to be converted back to Category 'A' configuration. This entailed the removal of the long-range fuel tanks in the fuselage and their replacement by weapons racks. At the same time the machines' undersides were to be stripped of their matt-black camouflage paint.

Speculation was rife. The unit's lengthy missions in the night skies over Britain were clearly a thing of the past. But what was to take their place? With their aircraft equipped solely with wing tanks, and now fitted with internal weapons racks accommodating bombs of 50 kg or less, all the signs were that the *Gruppe's* future role was to be tactical, presumably in support of the army in the field – but where, and against whom?

Theories abounded. Some of the younger crews were convinced that the cross-Channel invasion was at long last about to be launched, and that they would be employed in covering the Wehrmacht's advance through England's southern counties. But the *Gruppe's alte Hasen* (experienced veterans) were aghast at the very thought. They were only too well aware that the RAF's defences were now even stronger than they had been in the summer of 1940. The lack of any form of tropical equipment seemed to rule out the



9./KG 1's bomb-laden 'HT' taxies out at Amy in the late spring of 1941 for yet another night raid on the English Midlands. That all-concealing coat of black camouflage paint is soon to be removed, however, as the two *Gruppen* of KG 1 are about to head eastwards to take part in the invasion of the Soviet Union. There, the machine will survive for just 14 weeks, for this is believed to be the 'V4+HT' that was lost 'to unknown causes' near Leningrad on 28 September 1941

possibility of deployment to North Africa. And as far as the east was concerned, the German-Soviet pact of non-aggression – signed just before the outbreak of war – was still in place and working to the mutual benefit of both nations. In fact, one of the wilder flights of fancy even suggested that Germany and the Soviet Union were about to join forces in a combined drive southwards to the oilfields of Persia!

Then, after more than two weeks of rumour and uncertainty, II. and III./KG 1 were transferred up to airfields close to the Baltic coast. In order to disguise the move they did not fly in massed formation, but were sent off in widely spaced *Ketten*, or vics of three. The following day, 17 June, the two *Gruppenkommandeure*, Hauptmann Otto Stams and Major Walter Lehwess-Litzmann, opened the sealed green envelopes that were to reveal their units' final destinations. Both were to move forward into East Prussia, II./KG 1 to Powunden, close to the provincial capital Königsberg, and III./KG 1 some 25 miles further to the northeast to Eichwalde, near the shores of the Kurisches Haff lagoon.

The unpalatable truth began to dawn. The *Führer* was about to risk a two-front war by launching a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. All doubts were dispelled over the course of the next few days as lorry-load after lorry-load of bombs and ammunition was delivered to the two fields. Finally, on the evening of 21 June, the *Staffeln* were assembled and Hitler's call-to-arms was read aloud to them;

'Soldiers of the eastern front, after months of great anxiety and self-imposed silence the time has now come, my soldiers, when I can speak to you quite openly. There are about 160 Russian divisions massed along our border. For weeks past this border has been subject to constant violation. And not only our border, but also those of Finland to the far north and of Rumania. At this moment, soldiers of the eastern front, a concentration of fighting power is being assembled which, in size and scope, is the largest the world has ever seen. In alliance with Finnish divisions, your comrades are poised on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. You are standing on the eastern front.

'In Rumania, along the banks of the River Pruth and on the Danube down to the Black Sea coast, German and Rumanian troops are united under Head of State Antonescu. When this greatest fighting front in the history of the world now takes up arms, it does so not only to ensure the successful outcome of the present conflict – or to protect those nations currently under threat – but to save Europe's entire civilisation and culture. German soldiers! You are thus embarking on a hard struggle fraught with responsibility. For the fate of Europe, the future of the German Reich, the very existence of our *Volk*, now lie in your hands, and your hands alone!'

The two *Gruppen* of KG 1 were just one small part of the vast array of military might that the Wehrmacht had gathered along Germany's eastern border provinces. More than two-thirds of all the Luftwaffe's operational *Kampfgruppen* had been redeployed in readiness for the attack. Numbering 32 in total, 18 of them were equipped with Ju 88s.

These 18 *Gruppen* were divided somewhat unequally between the four *Luftflotten* (Air Fleets) stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea. By far the greatest concentration of Ju 88 bombers along what was to become the main eastern front was on the northern sector, where all nine of *Luftflotte* 1's *Kampfgruppen* were equipped with this type. In addition to

At the start of the hostilities against Russia the only Ju 88 bomber presence on the central sector of the front was provided by two *Gruppen* of KG 3. Although the full code of this II. *Gruppe* aircraft is not decipherable in this illustration from a wartime magazine, the white lightning bolt (on a red shield) below the cockpit that gave the *Geschwader* its name – *'Blitz'* – is clearly visible

the two *Gruppen* of Oberst Karl Angerstein's KG 1 'Hindenburg', this Air Fleet also controlled two other *Kampfgeschwader* – Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst Bormann's KG 76 and Oberst Johann Raithel's KG 77, each of which had a full establishment of three component *Gruppen.*

The above eight *Gruppen* together formed I. *Fliegerkorps*, the northern sector's primary bomber force. The ninth *Gruppe* was the semi-autonomous *Kampfgruppe* 806 commanded by Major Hans Emig. This was subordinated to the *Fliegerführer Ostsee* (Air Commander Baltic), which, as its name implies, would be engaged predominantly in maritime operations.

Luftflotte 2 on the central sector of the front had eight *Kampfgruppen* in all. But of this number only two, I. and II./KG 3 'Blitz', which formed part of II. *Fliegerkorps*, were flying Ju 88s. Although assigned to the same Air Fleet, the *Geschwader's* third *Gruppe* was still equipped with Do 17s and currently operating within neighbouring VIII. *Fliegerkorps.*

Along the southern sector the two *Fliegerkorps* of *Luftflotte* 4 included no fewer than 12 *Kampfgruppen*, the largest number of any of the Air Fleets. Five of the 12 were equipped with the Ju 88, and these were all attached to V. *Fliegerkorps.* They comprised the three *Gruppen* of Major Hans Bruno Schulz-Heyn's KG 51 'Edelweiss', together with I. and II./KG 54 'Totenkopf'. Like KG 1 to the north, Oberstleutnant Otto Höhne's KG 54 consisted at this time of only two *Gruppen*, III./KG 54 having been disbanded back in July 1940.

Finally, in the far north, two of the three *Kampfgruppen* available to *Luftflotte* 5 for operations above the Arctic Circle were also flying Ju 88s. In fact, I. and II./KG 30 'Adler' were the longest serving Ju 88 units in the Luftwaffe, having been activated on the then-new *Wunderbomber* in the opening weeks of the war. A third *Gruppe* had been established early in 1940 but this unit, III./KG 30, was presently serving alongside the Ju 88s of LG 1 in the Mediterranean (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft Nos 17* and *75* respectively).

Despite the magnitude of the undertaking, Operation *Barbarossa* – the invasion of the Soviet Union – was to begin in exactly the same manner as every other successful *Blitzkrieg* campaign launched by the Wehrmacht to date, with a series of surprise attacks on the enemy's airfields. Much has been written in the past on the part played by the Luftwaffe's fighter and Stuka units in these pre-emptive strikes, but the *Kampfgruppen* also had a vitally important role to perform.

For much of the first half of the war against the Soviet Union, bomber operations above the Arctic Circle were almost the sole preserve of KG 30, the famous *'Adler'*, or 'Eagle', *Geschwader*

Some 100+ specially selected crews – including, for example, almost a dozen from the two Ju 88 *Gruppen* of KG 3, based near Deblin in Poland – would form the spearhead of the assault on Russia. All highly experienced in night flying from their recent operations during the *Blitz* on Britain, these crews were to take off in the very early hours of 22 June 1941. Split up into small groups of no more than three to five aircraft, their job would be to locate and illuminate the 30+ major Soviet airfields strung along the frontier from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

By 0300 hrs on the opening morning of *Barbarossa,* these *ad hoc* pathfinders were nearing their assigned objectives. Soon, showers of incendiaries were raining down on the forward Russian fields, lighting the way for the first waves of the main attacking force, which were following hard on the heels of the small vanguard formations. Once the latter had completed their initial task, each returned to base to rearm and add its weight to the continuing attacks on the Red Air Force that would be kept up until last light. KG 3's most successful pilot on this first day of hostilities in the east was undoubtedly Leutnant Ernst-Wilhelm Ihrig, the *Kapitän* of 3. *Staffel,* who alone claimed the destruction of 60 enemy aircraft on the ground after making half a dozen low-level passes over the airfield at Pinsk, some 100 miles due east of Brest-Litovsk.

While I. and II./KG 3 constituted the sole Ju 88 bomber presence on the central sector, eight of the nine Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* controlled by *Luftflotte* 1 to the north were also employed in strikes against airfields.

KG 1's objectives were the Red Air Force bases protecting the two main ports on the west coast of Latvia's Courland Peninsula, with II./KG 1 being despatched against Windau (Ventspils) close to the peninsula's northern tip, and III./KG 1 targeting the much larger Libau (Liepaja) to the south. Taking off from forward fields in East Prussia at 0215 hrs, the two units reached their respective targets 45 minutes later. In the half-light of the false dawn that was 'illuminating a thin strip of sky to the north', the crews of III. *Gruppe* could make out the long orderly rows of Russian fighters parked wingtip to wingtip around the edges of Libau airfield. They presented a target that was impossible to miss. After releasing its bombs 'almost as if on exercise', the *Gruppe* returned to base, all landing back before sunrise without loss. A second mission against Libau was flown later that morning, and although the Ju 88s encountered both fighters and flak on this occasion, again all crews returned safely.

The six *Gruppen* of KGs 76 and 77, which were similarly engaged against other Soviet airfields in the Baltic states and in that part of northeastern Poland that had been occupied by the Russians in September 1939, apparently fared less well. They reported several inexplicable losses that were at first attributed to the over-zealousness of their own troops – what today would be termed 'friendly fire incidents'.

Luftflotte 1's ninth Ju 88 bomber *Gruppe* was Major Emig's *Kampfgruppe* 806. As befitted its past history (it had originally been activated as a coastal unit back in November 1939) and its current subordination to the *Fliegerführer Ostsee,* KGr 806 did not participate in the raids on the Red Air Force's forward fields, but was employed instead in a maritime role. Undertaking possibly the longest mission flown by any unit on the opening day of *Barbarossa,* Emig's crews made the 1000-mile round trip from East Prussia to the Soviet Baltic Fleet's main naval base at

Kronstadt, off Leningrad, where they laid 27 aerial mines. The end result hardly justified the effort and the losses involved (at least one source refers to six aircraft failing to return), for the only known victim of the minefield was the 499-ton Estonian steamer *Ruhno*, which went down later that same day. During the course of the operation, however, KGr 806 machines reportedly sank the 2329-ton Soviet freighter *Luga*.

Further to the north still, high above the Arctic Circle, the Ju 88 bombers of *Luftflotte* 5 were also to make their first contribution to *Barbarossa* by attacking the Soviet airfields around Murmansk. Once this had been done, they would then be required to mine the port and its approaches. These two tasks were something of a tall order given the fact that fewer than a dozen of the Air Fleet's 40+ available Ju 88s were scheduled to carry them out. In fact, of the two *Gruppen* of KG 30 currently assigned to *Luftflotte* 5 in Norway, only a single *Staffel* had initially been instructed to transfer from Stavanger-Sola in the south of the country up to Banak, close to the Finnish border in the far north.

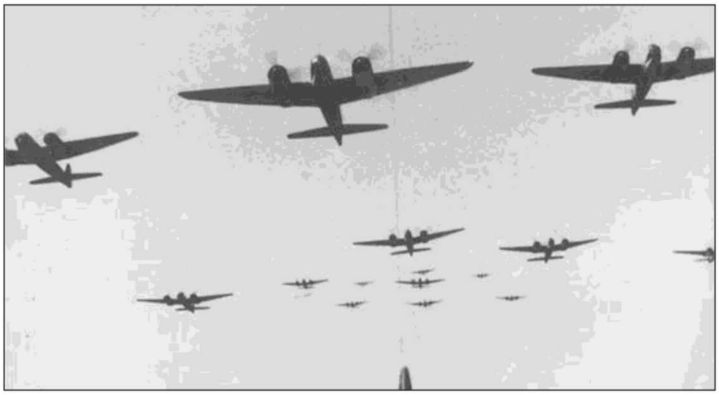
Reference sources are at odds as to the exact identity of this particular *Staffel*. Some state that it was 5./KG 30, while others (including the memoirs of an ex-member of the unit concerned) maintain that it was 6./KG 30. Whatever the truth of the matter, the question is now academic, for bad weather in the northern area on 22 June prevented most machines from taking off. Some did manage to get into the air the following day. Among the sorties flown was one sent out to mine the Kola Inlet. By this time, however, the remaining two *Staffeln* of II./KG 30 had also been ordered north from Stavanger to bolster the Luftwaffe's strength in its isolated campaign against Soviet forces in the Arctic.

No such problems beset the units of *Luftflotte* 4 on the southern sector of the main eastern front, where the five *Kampfgruppen* of KGs 51 and 54 were grouped together under V. *Fliegerkorps* around Krosno and Lublin, in German-occupied Poland. The main objective of the Wehrmacht's ground forces on the southern sector was the Ukrainian capital Kiev. It was in order to support *Panzergruppe* 1's drive due east out of Poland through the forward Kiev Military District towards this city that the Air Fleet's Ju 88 *Gruppen* were ordered to bomb specific Soviet airfields along the route of advance. For KG 51 it was to prove a costly venture.

After the obligatory reading of the *Führer's* stirring call-to-arms to all 'Soldiers of the Eastern Front', the heavily laden Junkers began to take off for the first of the day's four missions – the *Geschwaderstab*, together with I. and II. *Gruppen* from Krosno, and III./KG 51 from nearby Lezany – a total of some 80 bombers in all.

Major Walter Marienfeld's III. *Gruppe* fared worst. Although crews reportedly destroyed at least 34 Polikarpov biplanes on the ground at their assigned target, an airfield south of Lvov (Lemberg) that was just 40 miles beyond the border, they were set upon by other Soviet fighters as they turned for home. A running battle developed and seven of the 28 bombers despatched by III./KG 51 did not make it back to base, five of the losses being suffered by 9. *Staffel* alone.

Further casualties were sustained during the three subsequent missions in and around the Kiev District later in the day. After the last machine had landed at 2023 hrs the mood in Major Schulz-Heyn's *Geschwader* HQ in Krosno's Polanka Castle was sombre. 60 men –



A *Gruppe* of Ju 88s *en route* to the target in tight formation was an impressive sight

15 complete crews – were dead or missing, and many more had been wounded. The luckless III. *Gruppe* reported 14 aircraft either shot down, written off or severely damaged in crashes, resulting in a casualty rate for the day of exactly 50 per cent! Among the *Geschwader's* dead was the popular Oberleutnant von Wenchowski, the Staffelkapitän of 5./KG 51, whose 'earthy good humour would be sadly missed by one and all'.

Some 110 miles away from KG 51's main base at Krosno, the two *Gruppen* of KG 54, together with Oberstleutnant Otto Höhne's *Geschwaderstab*, all shared the airfield at Swidnik on the outskirts of Lublin. Höhne's crews were also scheduled to fly four missions on this opening day of *Barbarossa*, but their casualties would be far fewer than those suffered by neighbouring KG 51. In fact, just three aircraft were lost – one brought down by enemy fighters and two written off in emergency landings – while four others were damaged but repairable.

The first of the 23 Ju 88s of Hauptmann Richard Linke's I./KG 54 lifted off from Swidnik at 0230 hrs. They were followed by the machines of II./KG 54 under the command of Major Erhart Krafft von Dellmensingen. Carrying a mix of 250 kg HE bombs and smaller fragmentation bombs – the standard load of most Ju 88 units on this first day of the campaign in the east – each *Gruppe* was assigned three target airfields, which were presumably to be attacked on an individual *Staffel* basis. Although several enemy fighters were encountered, they did not press home their attacks with any vigour and all KG 54's aircraft returned safely to base. The defenders were up in greater numbers during I. *Gruppe's* second mission of the morning. Some 30-40 fighters engaged the eight Ju88s targeting Nielisk airfield but again the latter got back unscathed, claiming one I-153 biplane shot down and one probable.

II./KG 54's second mission, flown about an hour later, did not go so well, however. Having bombed the airfields at Luck and Kolki, crews flew back at low level, ground strafing knots of enemy troops on the way. They received a rude surprise. For the first time they experienced the Red Army's disconcerting habit when under fire, not of diving for the nearest available cover, but of standing its ground and letting fly with every weapon that could be brought to bear. The net result was two aircraft so badly damaged by small-arms fire that they were forced to crash-land behind enemy lines. Both machines were from 4. *Staffel*, including that of the *Kapitän*, Oberleutnant Günther Seubert who, although wounded, made his way back to friendly territory along with two of his injured crew.

By day's end Luftwaffe units had submitted claims for an incredible 1811 Soviet aircraft destroyed – 1489 on the ground and 322 brought down in combat or by flak. If anywhere near accurate, these figures would make 22 June 1941 the most disastrous day for any air force in the history of aerial warfare. At the time they seemed so excessive that even Hermann Göring, the Luftwaffe's flamboyant Commander in Chief and himself no stranger to exaggeration, demanded that they be checked. Subsequent investigation showed that the totals were on the conservative side!

Fighter pilots were not the only ones to beat up their home airfield on returning from a successful mission. Individual bomber crews often did the same – especially if one of the gunners had shot down an enemy machine

Others accepted the figures at their face value. That same evening the Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe recorded in his diary, 'The timing of this air assault on the Russian airfields on the first day of the campaign was a total success. These attacks pave the way for operations against the whole of the Soviet Air Force'. Even some of the enemy shared the same view. A Soviet Army commander taken prisoner in the early stages of the fighting in the east is on record as saying, 'Our losses in the air in the first days were horrendous. Our air force will never recover from them'. It is debatable, however, whether the general believed this, or whether he was telling his captors what they wanted to hear.

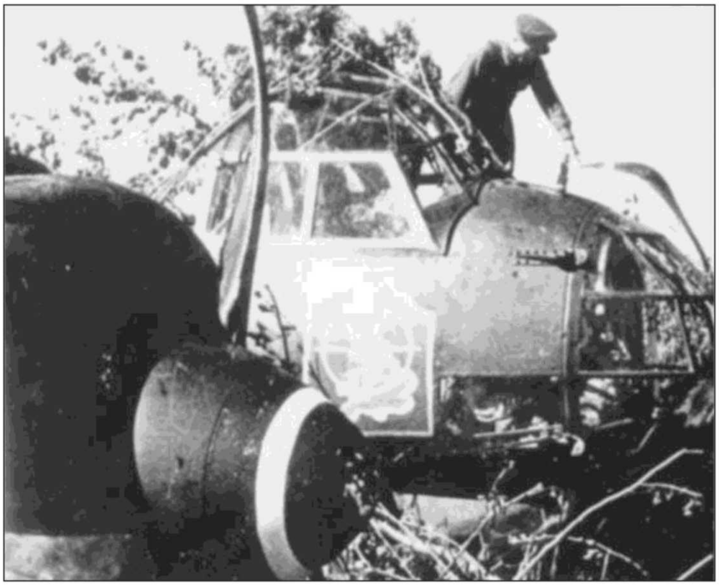
Although they pale into insignificance against the casualties suffered by the Soviets, the Luftwaffe's own losses on 22 June were far from light. Some 167 aircraft were reported destroyed or damaged from all causes. Of the 61 machines lost as a direct result of enemy action, almost a third – 21 in all – were Ju 88s. The bulk of these were accounted for in the trouncing inflicted by the Russians upon the unfortunate KG 51. But now another, far more invidious, cause of loss had come to light. Those bombers that had inexplicably exploded in mid-air while over German-held territory had not been the victims of friendly fire as at first thought. They had been brought down by their own bombs.

The culprit was the 10 kg SD 10 fragmentation bomb which, although intended primarily as an anti-personnel weapon, was used in great numbers and to devastating effect by the *Kampfgruppen* in their early raids on the Soviet frontier airfields. Unfortunately the SD 10 had a dangerous flaw. Carried in the Junkers' fuselage bomb-bays, usually in bundles of four, an individual bomb could sometimes get caught up in the bomb-bay upon release. Fully armed, it then took just the slightest jolt to detonate it. The resultant explosion was the equivalent of a direct flak hit, and almost invariably led to the loss of the bomber. Once this was discovered, orders were given that the *Kampfgruppen* were no longer to include the SD 10 in their weapons loads. Henceforward, it would be employed only by Stuka and ground-attack units, where it was carried externally underwing and would be sure of falling free when released.

Despite these difficulties, the pace of operations did not slacken. On the southern sector KG 51's losses were hastily made good, and the two Ju 88 *Kampfgeschwader* of V. *Fliegerkorps* continued their attacks on the enemy airfields standing in the path of *Panzergruppe* 1's advance on Kiev. Machines of the *Korps'* reconnaissance *Staffel* had located no fewer than 62 such fields situated ahead of Army Group South's forces. These were grouped mainly in the Kiev, Stanislau and Odessa areas, and reports stated that 51 of them appeared to be occupied by 1270+ aircraft.

Over the course of the next few days KGs 51 and 54 mounted a series of raids on Soviet air bases. These resulted in several hundred more

Red Air Force machines being destroyed on the ground. But the attackers had to pay a price too. On 25 June, the day KG 51 bombed the Soviet airfield at Tarnopol, the *Geschwader* lost 16 aircrew killed or missing. Major Walter Marienfeld, the *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*, was lucky not to be among them. With both engines shot up, he managed to pull off an emergency landing on a sand bank in the River Bug from which he and his crew were rescued by a squad of infantrymen. KG 54 escaped more lightly on this date too, with just one 4. *Staffel* machine and its all-NCO crew being reported missing north of Kiev.



A Soviet officer inspects an aircraft of II./KG 54 *'Totenkopf'* that has force-landed behind enemy lines. Note the (now somewhat inappropriate) *Gruppe* badge consisting of a map of Britain with a bombsight superimposed, and the small fairings behind the nose glazing indicating that the machine is an A-6 variant previously equipped with – or intended for – a balloon-cable fender. Might it even be the *Gruppenstab's* 'B3+EC', an A-6 that failed to return to base on 23 June?

The enemy's air bases were not the bombers' only objectives. Both *Geschwader* were also called upon to provide more direct support to the forces in the field by carrying out low-level attacks on concentrations of Soviet troops and armour. One such operation was flown on 26 June against a group of 'super heavy tanks of the Red Army' (this was probably a reference to the cumbersome 45-ton T-35, a multi-turreted but relatively thinly armoured 'land battleship' introduced into service in 1933). The Russian behemoths, threatening the open flank of *Panzergruppe* 1, were successfully repulsed, but this time it was KG 54 that bore the brunt of the losses. These included an aircraft of 5. *Staffel*, which crashed on landing back at Swidnik, killing its entire crew and completely demolishing two other machines on the ground.

In fact, such was the alarming rate of attrition being suffered by the two *Geschwader* from light anti-aircraft and small arms fire during these low-level attacks that the GOC of V. *Fliegerkorps*, *General der Flieger* Ritter von Greim, soon ordered a halt to them. From now on the Ju 88s were to operate at medium altitude, releasing their bombs – 50, 250 or 500 kg, depending upon the target – from a shallow dive.

Despite this curtailment of their air support, the armoured divisions of *Panzergruppe* 1 continued to forge ahead. And it was not long before the Ju 88s were also making their first moves forward to keep pace with them. By mid-July the two *Gruppen* of KG 54 had transferred 160 miles south-southeast from Lublin-Swidnik to Dubno, close to the pre-war Polish-Russian border. And almost midway between Lublin and Dubno, the airfield at Wlodzimierz now housed III./KG 51, which had moved up from Lezany on 5 July. But for the other two *Gruppen* of KG 51, those initially based at Krosno, there came a parting of the ways with V. *Fliegerkorps*. Their first move of the *Barbarossa* campaign took them southwards into Rumania, I./KG 51 to Zilistea and II./KG 51 to Balti. Here, they were subordinated to Generalleutnant Kurt Pflugbeil's IV. *Fliegerkorps*, whose area of operations included the southernmost reaches of the Russian front along the Black Sea coastal belt.

Armourers cheerfully tote a load of 50 kg bombs to a waiting machine

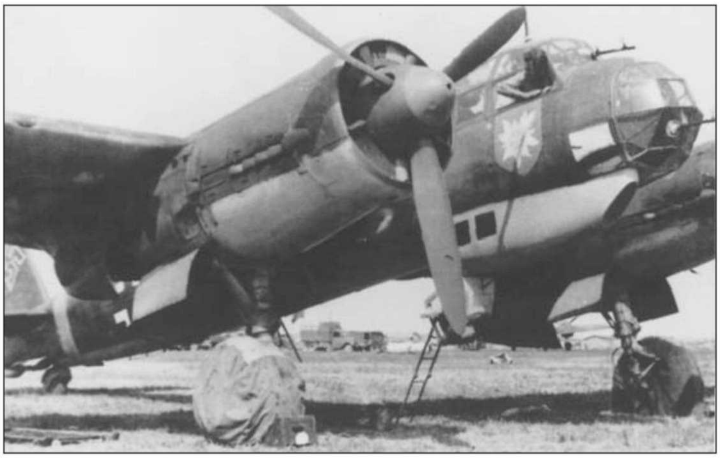
Meanwhile, on the central sector, the two Ju 88 *Gruppen* of KG 3 had also been performing the twin tasks of attacking the enemy's forward airfields and supporting their own troops on the ground. The forces on this central area of the front formed the very core of Hitler's *Blitzkrieg* offensive against Russia. Their striking power was concentrated in two *Panzergruppen* – Nos 2 and 3, a total of 17 armoured and mechanised divisions in all – closely supported by the Stukas and ground-attack aircraft of *General der Flieger* Wolfram von Richthofen's highly experienced VIII. *Fliegerkorps*. It was these two *Panzergruppen's* parallel advances towards, and subsequent pincer movements around, Minsk – the capital of White Russia and western terminus of the Minsk-Moscow highway – which resulted in the first of the great 'cauldron' battles of the eastern front.

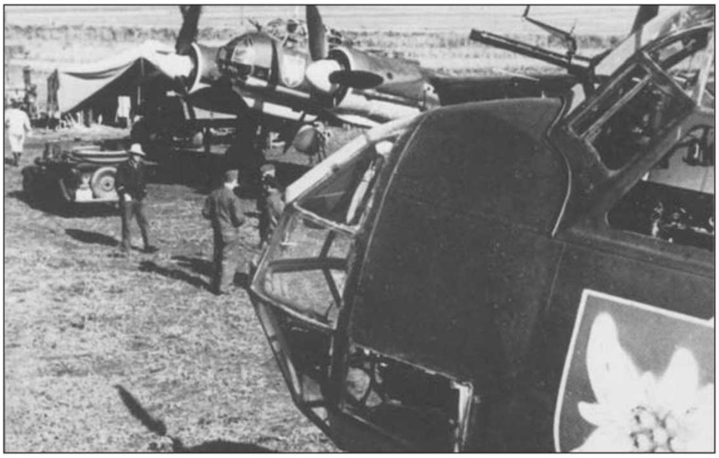
However the Panzers had left a problem in their wake. On the opening day of the campaign, with their sights firmly set on Minsk, they had bypassed the ancient fortified Polish citadel of Brest-Litovsk. Situated on the eastern bank of the River Bug and held by the Red Army, the guns of the fortress were in range of the Germans' main lines of communications and supply. It posed a grave threat, but every attempt to batter it into submission ended in failure. For a week its walls proved impervious to everything thrown at them, from the huge shells of the army's giant 60 cm mortar *'Karl'*, to the 500 kg bombs of VIII. *Fliegerkorps'* Stukas.

On 28 June (some sources put it a day later) von Richthofen's dive-bombers made one last attempt to breach the citadel's defences. Again they were unsuccessful. That same afternoon, between 1740 and 1800 hrs, seven Ju 88s of KG 3 appeared high overhead. Each machine was carrying a single 1800 kg *'Satan'* bomb. These weapons had been specially delivered to the *Geschwader's* airfield outside Deblin for this one mission. Two direct hits were scored on the eastern fort, the citadel's main centre of resistance. Some 400 soldiers emerged and surrendered to the Wehrmacht's 45. Infantry Division. The remainder of the garrison, numbering 7000 men, gave themselves up the following day and Army Group Centre's supply lines were at last secured.

There were to be no such unexpected hazards, nor any great 'cauldron' battles, in Army Group North's sector, but rather a steady – at times even rapid – advance northeastwards through the Baltic States and across northern Russia

Proudly displaying the *Geschwader's* elaborate *'Edelweiss'* emblem, an A-5 of II./KG 51 basks in the Rumanian sunshine shortly after its arrival at Balti just five days into *Barbarossa*. Note the tarpaulin covers protecting the mainwheel tyres





III./KG 51 joined II. *Gruppe* at Balti at the end of August fresh from its re-equipment in the Reich. The unit's new A-4s sport the bright yellow trim indicative of a III. *Gruppe*. In KG 51's case this was applied to the front edge of the engine nacelles and as a thin outline to the *Geschwader* badge – compare with the far less apparent red trim adorning the II. *Gruppe* machine pictured on page 14. It is believed that the spinner colours identified the *Staffel* within the *Gruppe*

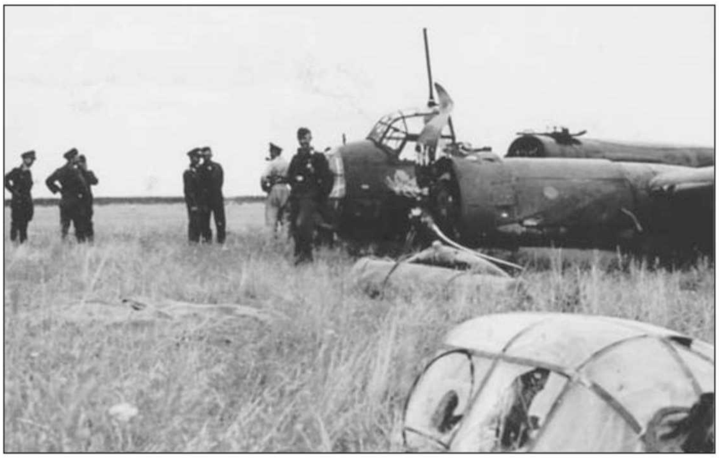
towards the ground forces' ultimate objective, Leningrad. This did not mean that the eight Ju 88 *Gruppen* of I. *Fliegerkorps* were underemployed. Indeed, for the first few days of the campaign the Junkers kept up their attacks on the Red Air Force's frontline airfields. These raids, flown both during the hours of daylight and under cover of darkness, were proving costly (*Luftflotte* 1 reported another 18 Ju 88 bombers shot down on 23 June). But their intensity soon persuaded the enemy to vacate his forward air bases and withdraw all his flying units behind the line of the River Dvina.

On 27 June, with local air superiority thus achieved, the aircraft of KGs 1, 76 and 77 began harassing Soviet troops and armour retreating out of Latvia and Estonia. These operations, flown at lower altitudes, inevitably resulted in even lengthier casualty lists for all three *Geschwader*. On the very first day a mission directed against Red Army units withdrawing south of the Latvian capital Riga cost II./KG 1 their *Gruppenkommandeur* when Hauptmann Otto Stams' aircraft was hit by ground fire. Although seriously wounded, Stams managed to nurse the crippled machine back to Powunden, where he was immediately rushed into hospital. Surgeons were unable to save his leg, however, and its amputation spelled the end of his operational flying career.

After the first German troops had entered Riga on 29 June, a number of Ju 88 *Gruppen* were released to attack targets further afield. These were located primarily along the Soviets' rear area lines of supply and included the road and rail routes between Riga and Pleskau (Pskov), close to the southern tip of Lake Peipus, and Velikye Luki, an important junction on the railway line linking the Baltic States to Moscow.

One unit that particularly distinguished itself during these long-range missions was II./KG 77. Commanded by Hauptmann Dietrich Peltz – who was already sporting the Knight's Cross in recognition of operations flown over Great Britain, and who would subsequently rise to high office as the *General der Kampfflieger* – this *Gruppe* undertook a number of 1000-mile and more round trips from their base at Wormditt, in East Prussia, to attack the main Leningrad-Moscow railway line. Its crews specifically targeted stations and marshalling yards along this important stretch, as well as canals and locks in the same area. It is claimed that their pinpoint accuracy often resulted in such installations being out of action for days, if not

The losses suffered during the opening days and weeks of *Barbarossa* were not all one-sided. This A-5 of 8./KG 76 – note the jettisoned cabin canopy in foreground – was lucky to make it back to Schippenbeil for a belly landing after being hit by Soviet anti-aircraft fire...



...equally fortunate was this machine of II./KG 1 bellied in at Powunden, the crew's hasty exit evidenced by the cabin canopy lying upside-down on that bullet-holed wing. On this occasion, according to the pilot, the perpetrators were 'a trio of I-18s'

weeks on end, and that they alone were responsible for significant disruptions to rail and barge traffic between the Soviet Union's two major cities.

Enemy airfields remained high on the list of priorities for I. *Fliegerkorps'* bombers. On 3 July the two *Gruppen* of KG 1 mounted a successful dusk raid on the base at Pleskau, and at 0500 hrs the following morning elements of KGs 76 and 77 attacked the enemy's airfields at Opochka and Idritsa, some 90 miles further to the south.

It was at this juncture that Soviet forces launched a counter-attack aimed at halting the German advance on Leningrad. Having crossed the River Dvina south of Riga on 2 July, the spearheads of *Panzergruppe* 4 had progressed 200+ miles in just three days. On 5 July they established a bridgehead over the River Velikaya, and it was here, around the town of Ostrov, situated between Pleskau and Opochka, that the Russians struck.

KGs 1, 76 and 77 were called upon to help counter this very real threat. Their intervention proved crucial, as once again it was the bombers that were instrumental in averting the danger to a *Panzergruppe's* exposed flanks. Not only did they operate in direct support of the ground troops below, breaking up the approaching Soviet armoured formations, they also bombed enemy airfields in the immediate vicinity and beyond. By the end of the action, for the loss of only two Ju 88s, they had claimed nearly 150 tanks knocked out and 112 aircraft destroyed on the ground.

With one of the last major water barriers successfully negotiated, the way to Leningrad now seemed wide open. The city lay 200 miles away – the distance recently covered by *Panzergruppe* 4 in just 72 hours. But a lot can happen in 200 miles, and Generaloberst Erich Hoepner's armoured divisions were fated never to roll down Leningrad's broad boulevards.

On 5 July, II./KG 1, commanded now by Hauptmann Emil Enderle, transferred forward from Powunden to Riga-Spilve (where it was soon joined by III. *Gruppe*, the latter after a stopover at Mitau, to the southwest of the Latvian capital). This move facilitated raids on Soviet airfields in neighbouring Estonia. In addition, it enabled them to carry out more attacks on road and rail targets between Lakes Peipus and Ilmen, and also to fly armed reconnaissance missions over the Leningrad region.

But despite all the crushing blows they were inflicting upon the enemy, Russian resistance could at times still be fanatical. This was demonstrated on 6 July when 6./KG 1's 'V4+MP' was deliberately

The Ju 88 reconnaissance units faced all of the dangers but received few of the plaudits accorded to the bombers. This aircraft of 5.(F)/122 burns fiercely following a take-off accident at Jürgenfelde, the field it shared with II./KG 76

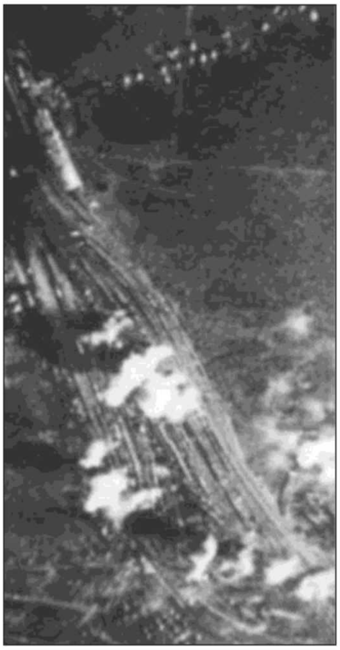
rammed by a MiG-3 fighter near Lake Ilmen. It was by no means a unique occurrence. The first such ramming attack had been carried out within an hour of *Barbarossa* being launched, and eight further instances of Luftwaffe aircraft being intentionally rammed had been recorded before the opening day of the campaign against Russia was over.

Such tactics, dubbed *'taran'* attacks by the Soviets, should not be likened to the consciously suicidal kamikaze missions later flown by the Japanese in the Pacific. They were not the result of official policy, but rather made at the discretion of individual pilots and employed as a last resort, often when the attacker's ammunition had been expended. Nor was the Soviet pilot who chose to engage the enemy by *'taran'* automatically seeking his own death. Many *were* killed, of course, but various methods of *'taran'* were employed. The most common was probably the approach from astern, with the attacker attempting to use his propeller to chew up his opponent's tail. The second involved a deliberate mid-air collision, possibly when the Soviet pilot's own machine had already been damaged and was itself about to crash. A third alternative was for the attacker to use one of his wings as a weapon of destruction, either by slicing it into the rudder of his adversary or – while avoiding actual contact – by positioning it close below the wingtip of the enemy aircraft and making use of the airflow to flip it over out of control.

By perfecting one or other of these methods, many Soviet pilots survived a *'taran'*. Some even scored more than one victory by such means, the highest number recorded being four. According to one contemporary report quoting 'far from complete returns', 43 airmen – the majority of whom survived – carried out successful ramming attacks between 22 June and 31 August 1941. By 1 January 1942 that figure had risen to 100+. But as the war progressed and slowly swung in the Soviets' favour, such incidents became understandably fewer. Nevertheless, by its end 200+ *'taran'* attacks are believed to have been carried out.

One such incident involving a Junkers – unfortunately unidentifiable – was described in a booklet produced by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow in 1942. Despite the clumsy turgidity of the language, it conveys a vivid impression of the times;

'Senior Lieutenant Vlassov was on duty, sitting in the cockpit of his fighting plane at his aerodrome. Suddenly a German "Junkers-88" dived out of the clouds. Vlassov was in the air in a flash. The bomber opened fire and then turned tail. Vlassov overhauled it and began firing at a range of 200 m. The enemy made off as fast as his engines would carry him. Vlassov put on speed, came within 50 m of the bomber, but found that his cartridges had run out. He decided to ram the bomber. He steered his plane to the left and under the Junkers, and thus got out of range of its machine gun, gave a short spurt and rammed it, cut across its rudder, breaking it clean off. Vlassov's plane bounced off the



Hauptmann Dietrich Peltz's II./KG 77 plaster the Bologoye marshalling yards on the Leningrad-Moscow railway

Machines of 5./KG 1 set out on a dusk raid against a target 'somewhere on the northern sector'

enemy plane and listed at an angle of 90 degrees. The fight took place at a height of 4500 metres.

'Dazed by the collision, when Vlassov's mind cleared he found that he was 1500 m from the ground. He tried the steering gear and found that it worked. The engine was silent and the propeller blades were bent. Vlassov was wounded in the right hand and blood flowed from his forehead, over the right eye. He could not see with his left eye as his goggles were smashed. Nevertheless, he landed his plane and then lost consciousness.'

24 hours after Unteroffizier Willi Bukowski and his crew of 6./KG 1 had been brought down by the MiG-3's *'taran'* attack near Lake Ilmen, III./KG 1 almost lost its *Gruppenkommandeur* during a raid on Pernau airfield on Estonia's western coast. Major Walter Lehwess-Litzmann later gave his own account of the incident;

'I could already make out the field from some distance away and could see a number of multi-engined aircraft parked around its perimeter. I put the machine into a shallow dive and gave it full throttle. We released our bombs from a height of 500-600 m and they were bang on target. I pulled up and away in a left-hand curve. We were already out over the waters of the gulf again when the starboard engine began pouring smoke – it had taken a hit. I switched it off and feathered the propeller. The smoke stopped, but I started to lose height. I didn't have the know-how to keep the machine in the air, and realising that I wouldn't make it to Riga, I turned back for the coast. I would have to attempt an emergency landing.

'As I crossed the shoreline I could see a large expanse of open meadows. I immediately decided to belly-land. It wasn't until we were about to touch down that we spotted that the landscape was dotted with numerous large rocks. The flight engineer strapped himself tightly in by my side, while the observer braced himself behind us and prepared to release the canopy roof the moment we landed. And so I made my first belly-landing. It came off. As soon as we hit the ground the observer yanked the canopy jettison lever forward. I switched off the port engine. The ventral gondola was soon torn off and there was an awful juddering and jolting. As we careened across the meadow an enormous great boulder suddenly loomed up in our path. Fortunately the machine came to a halt in the nick of time – there couldn't have been more than half-a-metre separating the glazed nose of our aircraft from the face of the huge rock.

'According to my map we still had to be in territory controlled by the Red Army. A nearby shepherd greeted us in a friendly enough fashion but knew nothing. An approaching cyclist turned out to be the village policeman who – like many in this area – could speak a few words of broken German. He confirmed that we were indeed in Estonia, that the Russians had made off northwards only two hours ago and that the Germans hadn't got here yet – we were the first to arrive!'

Not everybody was as lucky as Lehwess-Litzmann and his crew of 'V4+AD'. On 10 July KG 1 suffered the loss of three more Ju 88s, including another destroyed in a *'taran'* attack by an I-16. The following day three machines of KG 77 failed to return, and on 12 July KG 76 lost one. By mid-July the three *Kampfgeschwader* of I. *Fliegerkorps* had lost 59 aircraft. That represented almost 30 per cent of their serviceable strength at the start of *Barbarossa*, or the equivalent of the then current combat strength of one entire *Geschwader*. Despite this heavy rate of attrition, the Ju 88s kept up the pressure. High on their list of targets by this stage of the hostilities was the main railway line running eastwards out of Estonia, which they subjected to near constant bombardment in an effort to prevent Red Army units from escaping back into Russia proper.

While I. *Fliegerkorps'* units were thus engaged, the northern sector's only other Ju 88 *Gruppe* was waging what almost amounted to a private war of its own against Soviet shipping in the Baltic. The minelaying mission off Kronstadt flown by Hauptmann Emig and his crews of KGr 806 on the first day of the campaign established the basic pattern of operations for the weeks ahead. With its aircraft usually armed with a single 1000 kg LMB (*Luftmine 'B'*, or Aerial mine 'B') apiece, the *Gruppe* carried out a succession of minelaying sorties against specific targets, primarily Soviet naval bases, in the eastern Baltic and Gulf of Finland. However they also flew armed reconnaissance sweeps of the same areas to monitor enemy shipping movements, mounted anti-submarine patrols and undertook convoy escort duties to protect coastal supply routes.

In addition to this multiplicity of maritime tasks, KGr 806's services would sometimes be called upon for special bombing missions. It was one such, flown on 28 or 29 June, that was to cost the unit its *Kommandeur*.

The target was a set of lock gates close to the entrance of the Stalin Canal, a waterway that connected the eastern Baltic – via Lake Onega – to the White Sea. Armed with BM 1000s (the land-based equivalent of the LMB parachute mine, fitted with a conventional bomb-type tail), the attackers approached in three waves. The first was led by the now Major Hans Emig. In order to ensure the success of the mission, Emig went in at extremely low level. The lock gates were destroyed, but so too was Emig's aircraft, which took the full force of the blast. Hauptmann Erich Seedorf, the *Staffelkapitän* of 1./KGr.806, ordered the two following waves to bomb from a height of 100 m, and these escaped without further loss.

Under new *Kommandeur* Major Richard Linke, KGr 806 continued its anti-shipping activities over the Baltic. On 18 July two Soviet destroyers made a daring attempt to intercept a small German supply convoy heading for Daugavgriva, the Latvian port at the mouth of the River Dvina below Riga. The warships were unsuccessful and all the merchantmen reached harbour safely. Now the hunters became the hunted. The two destroyers reversed course and sought to escape from the confined waters of the Gulf of Riga, but 24 hours later they were caught in the narrows east of the island of Saaremaa by the Ju 88s of KGr 806. The 1686-ton *Serdity* was so badly damaged that, despite a three-day battle to save her, she finally had to be scuttled on 22 July.

As the first month of *Barbarossa* came to a close, German forces were advancing on all fronts and the Luftwaffe had gained near undisputed mastery of the air. All the signs pointed towards another successful *Blitzkrieg* campaign in the making. But this was just the beginning.

'M7+GH' was an A-6 of 1./KGr 806, the unit assigned to the *Fliegerführer Ostsee* for minelaying and other maritime missions over the Baltic. The *Gruppe* frequently used airfields in Finland as a forward base, and the aircraft is seen here here at Utti, northeast of Helsinki

BARBAROSSA – DECISION DEFERRED

It was Werner Baumbach, arguably the best known Ju 88 pilot in the Luftwaffe, and certainly one of its most highly decorated, who suggested that the first ten months of the air war in the east could be divided into four separate phases. The first of these, from 22 June to 21 July, saw the Luftwaffe wrest air superiority from the Soviets and support the first of the great 'cauldron' battles on the central sector. Next, from 22 July to the beginning of October, came the 'diversions to north and south, while the central sector remained temporarily quiescent'. Then, on 2 October, the main emphasis was switched back to the Moscow front with the launching of the ground offensive against the Russian capital, which was to last a further two months. Finally, from early December to the spring of 1942, a major enemy counter-offensive in the Moscow area, coupled with the first withdrawals of Luftwaffe units from the Russian to the Mediterranean theatre, dashed any last hopes of a speedy and successful conclusion to the campaign in the east.

But Baumbach's assertion that the central sector became 'quiescent' after 22 July seems to ignore the fact that it was on this very date that the Luftwaffe opened its strategic bombing offensive against Moscow. In fact, to add extra weight to the assault, *Luftflotte* 2 was even reinforced by four additional *Kampfgruppen* from the west. The only Ju 88 units that appear to have been involved in the raids on Moscow, however, were the Air Fleet's resident I. and II./KG 3.

Several sources maintain that elements of KG 54 were detached from neighbouring *Luftflotte* 4 in order to participate in the initial assault on Stalin's capital, but this is not borne out by the unit's history, which has both its *Gruppen* fully engaged in the Poltava-Cherkassy areas on 21 and 22 July.

The Soviets had long been expecting the Germans to launch an all-out aerial offensive against Moscow. The 195 bombers that participated in the first raid on the night of 21/22 July faced formidable

A victim of Moscow's ferocious anti-aircraft defences, 'F6+AK' of 2.(F)/122 lies broken-backed in a birch plantation outside the Soviet capital under the watchful eye of an armed local militiaman

defences – a belt of 300 searchlights 18 miles in front of the city, backed up by anti-aircraft batteries, both heavy and light, plus 170 fighters. It is not known how many of the attackers fought their way through to the target – certainly more than the 'ten or fifteen' noted in one Soviet publication, for another admitted heavy losses among the city's civil population. The Luftwaffe clearly failed in its stated aim of reducing the Kremlin to rubble, although one crew did come close – a single bomb crater in Red Square caused 'quite a stir among the locals the following morning'.

Despite the strength of the defences, this first raid resulted in the loss of only six bombers. A second flown on the night of 22/23 July cost the 115-strong attacking force five of its number, including three Ju 88s claimed by I-16s. The attacks were to continue on a nightly basis for some time to come, but they quickly declined in intensity – 100 raiders on the third night, 65 on the fourth, until the assault finally petered out in mid-September. Moscow suffered neither a single devastating blow such as that inflicted on Belgrade, nor was it subjected to a sustained aerial *Blitz* of the type endured by London. It has been estimated that of the 76 night raids flown against Moscow in 1941, all but 17 were little more than pinpricks carried out by small groups of from three to ten aircraft.

If Ju 88 activity on the central sector during this period was minimal, the same could not be said of the northern and southern fronts.

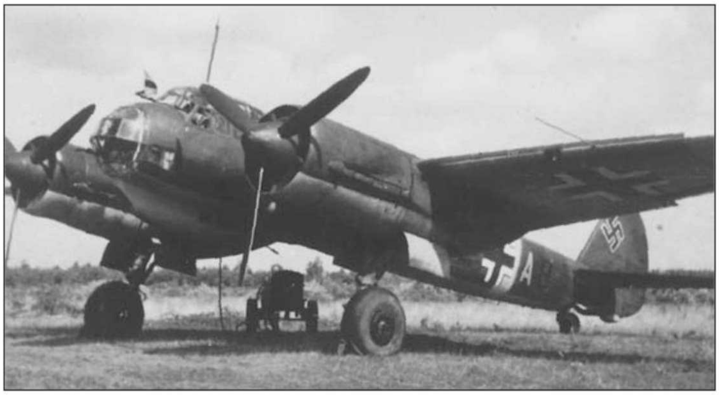
For the units of I. *Fliegerkorps* in the north it remained very much business as usual, but now that business was being conducted from Russian soil. On 14 July, III./KG 1 had made the move from Riga-Spilve to Pleskau. Nine days later II./KG 1 also vacated Riga. Their destination was Saborovka, where they were then joined by Oberst Karl Angerstein's *Geschwaderstab* and by III. *Gruppe* early in August. For very nearly the next three months this forward landing ground on the eastern shore of Lake Peipus was to serve as KG 1's main operating base.

By the end of July all three of the *Korps' Kampfgeschwader* were targeting Soviet supply lines into Leningrad as part of the softening-up process prior to an assault on the city. Although combat losses were not high during these missions, they did include a Ju 88 of 7./KG 76 downed by an I-16 ramming attack over Krasnogvardeisk on 27 July.

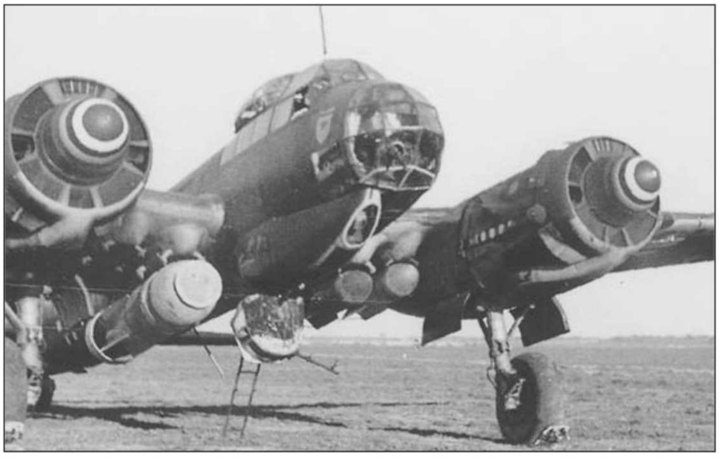
However the troops on the ground had run into difficulties. Having cleared much of the Baltic territories, they had now come up against the so-called Stalin Line. Stretching from the Gulf of Finland in the north to the Black Sea in the south and roughly paralleling, albeit some distance to the rear of, the Soviet Union's pre-1939 western borders, this was not a heavily fortified position in the sense of the French Maginot Line, but more a defensive zone of considerable depth combining man-made strongpoints with natural barriers such as lakes and rivers. Nevertheless, it was sufficient to bring a temporary halt to the momentum of advance.

The only Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* to participate in the initial raids on Moscow were I. and II./KG 3. A machine of the former unit (note white background shield to the red lightning bolt) is seen here undergoing a major engine overhaul – the starboard powerplant has been removed – with what appears to be two 250 kg bombs nestling beneath turf in the foreground

A contemporary newspaper cutting illustrating one of the earliest Knight's Crosses to be awarded to a Ju 88 pilot on the eastern front. It is being presented to Stabsfeldwebel Rudolf Nacke of III./KG 76 by Reichsmarschall Göring outside the latter's private train, in which he was making a whistlestop tour of Luftwaffe airfields. But, like the other half-dozen or so such awards first made in Russia, Nacke's decoration (announced on 23 July) was primarily for service prior to *Barbarossa*. With 130 operational missions already under his belt, Nacke was one of KG 76's most experienced pilots. He ended the war flying Me 262s and Ar 234s jet bombers with EKG 1



'3Z+AB' of the *Gruppenstab* I./KG 77. Officially, Luftwaffe regulations decreed that an aircraft bearing the individual letter 'A' should be flown by the unit commander, be he the *Geschwaderkommodore*, *Gruppenkommandeur* or *Staffelkapitän*, although this was not always the case in practice. Here, however, the rules are being followed, for 'AB' is also flying a *Gruppenkommandeur's* pennant in front of the windscreen, indicating that it is indeed the mount of Hauptmann Joachim Poetter



Loaded with what appears to be a 1000 kg SC 1000 bomb – nicknamed the 'Hermann' after you know who – on the starboard inner rack and a pair of SC 250s to port, this aircraft from KG 77 runs up its engines prior to a mission. Note the crudely applied black camouflage paint on the machine's undersides, particularly visible on the open ventral gondola entry hatch

While troops paused to collect their strength in preparation for the assault on the Stalin Line, the Ju 88 *Gruppen* offered indirect support. For III./KG 1 this meant attacking Soviet positions along and to the immediate rear of the defences, while II./KG 1 – whose aircraft were still configured to Category 'B', indicating that they had retained their rearmost fuselage fuel tank – flew longer range missions against rail traffic tasked with bringing up reinforcements and supplies from the enemy hinterland.

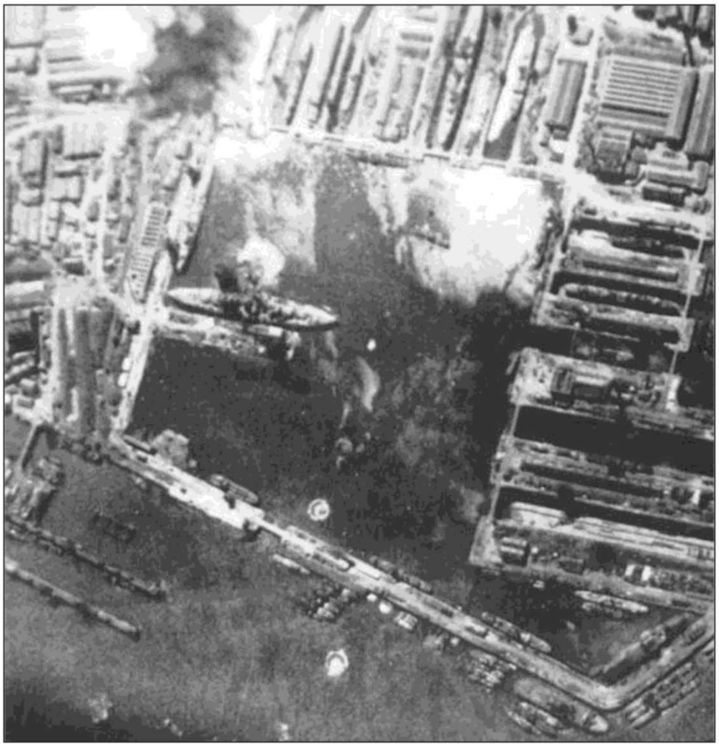
On 10 August, after a two-day delay due to bad weather, the armoured divisions of *Panzergruppe* 4 started to smash their way through that sector of the Stalin Line running along the lower Luga from Lake Ilmen to the Gulf of Finland. The Ju 88s were now required to provide much more direct support, flying ground-attack sorties against Soviet bunkers, artillery emplacements, tank concentrations and the like.

As the Panzers' advance on Leningrad slowly began to gather pace again, the *Kampfgruppen* reverted to the safeguarding of the ground forces' flanks. On 16 August KG 77 helped break up a dangerous Red Army counter-attack developing around Staraya Russa near the southern tip of Lake Ilmen. On that same date KG 1 succeeded in severing the railway line leading to the town of Luga midway between the northern shore of the lake and the sea. But on 25 August the unfortunate KG 76 suffered yet another loss to a *'taran'* attack near Krasnogvardeisk. This time it was a machine of 6. *Staffel* which had been rammed by a Yak-1.

On 15 September the Germans closed the ring around Leningrad. This heralded the start of an epic 900-day siege. During its early weeks the bombers of I. *Fliegerkorps* found themselves in constant demand. Not only were they assigned targets within Leningrad itself, they were also called upon to attack a number of fighter airfields in the surrounding areas in an effort to reduce the city's air defences. The 19 September raid on Kommandantskoye, which reconnaissance reported to be crowded with 100+ enemy aircraft, was particularly successful. The Ju 88s also dive-bombed ships of the Soviet Baltic Fleet berthed at Leningrad and Kronstadt, which were using their heavy armament to bombard German troops on shore. The ex-Czarist battleship *Oktyabrskaya Revolutsiya* suffered several near misses. Russian naval anti-aircraft fire made such operations expensive, and they were soon called off – Army Group North had more urgent tasks for the Luftwaffe's bombers.

One such task involved the planned offensive to be launched across the River Volkhov southeast of Leningrad. Its aim was to capture the town of Tichwin, an important junction on the main supply route for Soviet forces holding the southern shore of Lake Ladoga, and also eastern terminus of the tenuous air bridge into Leningrad itself.

Air support for this undertaking was to be provided by a specially activated task force – the small but grandiosely titled *Luftwaffenkommando Tichwin.* It was commanded by Oberst Johann Raithel, the *Geschwaderkommodore* of KG 77, whose Ju 88s constituted the *Kommando's* main striking power. However the misuse of the aircraft in low-level ground-attack sweeps led to heavy losses, and these in turn drew forth a strong protest from Hauptmann Dietrich Peltz, the highly experienced *Kommandeur* of II./KG 77. It has been suggested that Peltz's vociferous demands for a change in both tactics and leadership were the reason for his subsequent removal from the frontline. Although his remarks may have struck a chord somewhere along the line, it was more likely to have been his expertise that led to his posting. His next appointment was as CO of a newly created training *Staffel*, which was then expanded into the influential Bomber Unit Leaders' School.



This aerial shot purports to show part of Kronstadt naval base. If this is indeed the case, could that large broad-beamed warship in the inner basin be the *Oktyabrskaya Revolutsiya*? Note the bomb splashes straddling the mole and the column of black smoke close alongside the vessel

Nor were KG 77's losses solely the result of their own actions. The Red Air Force was slowly but surely recovering from the blows inflicted upon it at the start of *Barbarossa* and was now beginning to hit back. A number of the *Geschwader's* Ju 88s were destroyed when Soviet Il-2s carried out a surprise raid on their Siverskaya base on 6 November.

By this time Russia's autumn mud had given way to winter snow and conditions were deteriorating rapidly. Some flying units were more badly affected than others. In mid-September II./KG 1 had been recalled to Insterburg, in East Prussia, to re-equip with the new Ju 88A-4. When crews returned to Saborovka a month later the first snows had already fallen, and their field – little more than a grass strip full of bumps and hollows, and not ideal at the best of times – was now all but unusable. On 17 October the *Geschwaderstab* and III./KG 1 moved up to Dno. They were joined there by II. *Gruppe* the following week. Although Dno was bigger than Saborovka, it offered little improvement and was crowded with other units. II./KG 1 was ordered to take its Ju 88A-4s further forward still, to Staraya Russa, where it prepared to sit out the winter.

In the period from the beginning of *Barbarossa* on 22 June up until 31 October 1941, I. *Fliegerkorps* reported the loss of no fewer than 162 of its

The aftermath of a Soviet air attack on Siverskaya. The Ju 88 on the left has had its port wingtip well and truly clipped

Ju 88s. KG 1 had suffered the lowest casualty rate with 39 machines of its machines destroyed. KG 76 had lost 53, but KG 77 had been hit hardest of all with 70 aircraft shot down or written off to other causes.

Throughout the ground forces' advance on Leningrad, KGr 806 had been continuing its anti-shipping operations over the Baltic. Much of its time and energy was spent adding to the three major minefields designed to keep the Soviet fleet penned up in the Gulf of Finland. But on 6 August the *Gruppe* had deprived the Russians of another of their destroyers when its aircraft bombed the 1354-ton *Karl Marx* in Loksa Bight near Estonia's seaport capital Reval (Tallinn). As with the *Serdity*, the vessel's crew struggled desperately to save their ship, but the old destroyer, which dated back to before World War 1, finally went down two days later.

It was shortly after this that the Germans began their nine-day battle to take Reval, which also served as a major Soviet naval base. The bombers of KG 1 were to play a major supporting role in its capture. However it was the Russians' attempts at a seaborne evacuation after its fall that was to bring KGr 806 its greatest successes. On 28 August enemy vessels began to stream out of the shattered port. The aircraft of KGr 806, together with elements of KG 77, fell upon them while they were still west of *'Juminda'* – the first of the extensive minefields blocking their passage back into the 'safety' of the Gulf of Finland.

Among the Ju 88s' victims on the 28th were the 2250-ton former Latvian naval icebreaker *Krisjanis Valdemars*, now serving as a Soviet auxiliary, and three transports, the 2414-ton *Skrunda*, the 1423-ton *Atis Kronvaldis* (both ex-Latvian ships) and the 2317-ton *Lake Lucerne*. The 2026-ton *Vironia*, a former Estonian steamer taken over by the Soviet navy as a staff vessel,

Below
Bent and buckled, and with a tarpaulin replacing the jettisoned cabin canopy, 8./KG 76's 'F1+AS' is back on its feet after a forced landing in treacherous conditions

Bottom
An unpleasant surprise – I./KG 77 gets to grips with its first taste of a Russian winter

suffered only superficial bomb damage, but then struck a mine off Cape Juminda and sank with heavy loss of life including 'many leading Communist officials escaping from the Baltic States'.

The Ju 88s resumed their attacks the next day, 29 August, by which time most of the fleeing vessels had safely negotiated the *'Juminda'* field. But three more were caught and sunk on this date – the 1270-ton *Lensoviet* (*Leningradsoviet*), a naval navigational and hydrographic training ship and two transports, the 3974-ton *Vtaraya Piatiletka* and the 2190-ton *Kalpaks*, the latter another ex-Latvian auxiliary. Two other transports – the 3974-ton *Ivan Papanin* and the 1270-ton *Saule* (also requisitioned from the Latvians) – were severely damaged by bombs, as was the 5920-ton naval repair ship *Serp-i-Molot*. However, all three vessels managed to beach themselves on the Finnish island of Suursaari. A fourth naval auxiliary transport, the 3309-ton *Kazakhstan*, was likewise badly hit. But after making for another Finnish island, Seiskari, where she put ashore 2300 of the 5000 troops she was carrying, the ship limped into Kronstadt, only for her captain – despite having been wounded and blown overboard during the bombing – to be summarily executed for cowardice.

28 August had also witnessed another raid on the locks of the Stalin Canal, an operation that was to be repeated on 5 September. Just over two weeks later *Fliegerführer Ostsee* was reinforced by the arrival in Riga of the 14 Ju 88s of Hauptmann Josef Sched's 1./KGr 506. By this stage, however, plans for an all-out assault on Leningrad had been shelved, with Hitler decreeing in his War Directive No 35 that the city should instead simply be 'encircled more closely'. With the Soviet Baltic Fleet now effectively bottled up, this brought an end – albeit a premature one – to most of the Luftwaffe's anti-shipping operations in the area.

On 27 October the staff of the *Fliegerführer Ostsee* was disbanded and its component units deployed to other fronts. For Major Richard Linke's KGr 806 this meant a transfer, first to southern Finland and thence to the Mediterranean theatre, where it would subsequently be incorporated into KG 54 as that *Geschwader's* III. *Gruppe*. Finland was also the initial destination for the Ju 88s of Hauptmann Josef Sched's 1./KGr 506.

The dissolution of the *Fliegerführer Ostsee* may have indicated a belief on the part of the Luftwaffe leadership that the anti-shipping air war in the Baltic had come to an end. However on the southern sector a comparable campaign against the Soviet navy's Black Sea Fleet was far from over. Among the major protagonists of that campaign would be the Ju 88s of KG 51.

Unlike KGr 806 to the north, KG 51's activities were not confined to maritime missions alone. Its crews were also required to continue their support of the

Its unknown pilot grinning cheerfully from the cockpit, this A-4 of KG 77 bears a striking similarity to the machine pictured in the bottom photograph on page 22. It displays the same unit badge, of course – a device based on the banner and motto of Germany's medieval knights (see *Combat Aircraft 17*, page 57) – but note too the spinner markings. In fact, the only obvious difference is in the surroundings, the baked expanse of turf in the previous photo having given way to snow piled high against that wooden hangar just visible behind the tailplane

ground forces of Army Group South, but now that I. and II./KG 51 were operating from Rumania, the beneficiaries of that support was no longer *Panzergruppe* 1, which during this late summer of 1941 was still advancing on Kiev – but rather the troops of Generaloberst *Ritter* von Schobert's 11. *Armee*, whose objective was the Crimea.

The terrain below may have been new to crews of the two *Gruppen*, but the opposition they faced in the air was all too familiar. As in the north, Red Air Force units along the southern sectors were also beginning to recover from the early days of *Barbarossa* and were slowly starting to strike back. On 30 July, during an armed reconnaissance of the Odessa area, the pilot of a 4. *Staffel* machine was killed instantly when hit in the head by a round from an I-16. What happened next is described in a message from the GOC IV. *Fliegerkorps*, Generalleutnant Pflugbeil:

'Due to the narrow confines of the Ju 88's cockpit, the other members of the crew were unable to lift the pilot's body from its seat. The dead pilot's weight meant that the rudder remained on full lock. In addition, an engine had been damaged and was running irregularly. The autopilot had also been hit and was no longer functioning. Despite these enormous difficulties the navigator, Obergefreiter Bernhardt of 4./KG 51, took control of the aircraft. Although the air battle was still in progress, he flew it safely back over our own lines, at times through thick banks of cloud, and carried out a smooth belly landing near Racsani.

'His actions thus saved the remaining crew members and the aircraft.

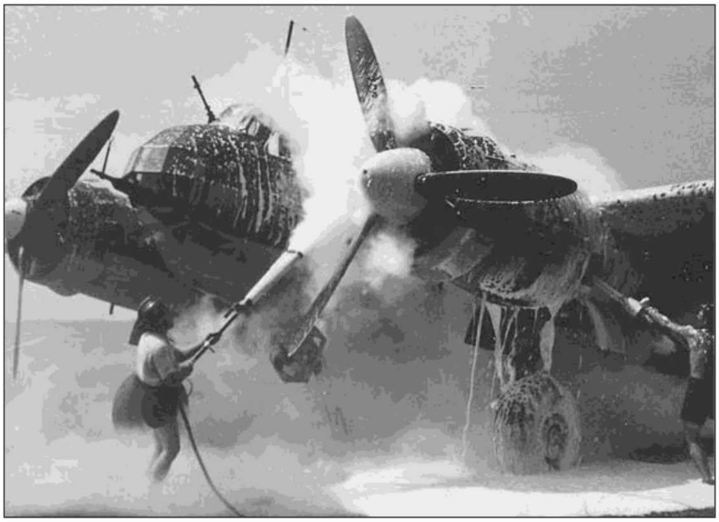
'For this outstanding deed, performed with circumspection and bravery, I extend to Bernhardt my most sincere appreciation.'

Generalleutnant Pflugbeil did more than send this letter of thanks. He promoted Bernhardt to the rank of unteroffizier with immediate effect and invited the surviving members of the crew to dine with him at Air Fleet HQ northeast of Bucharest.

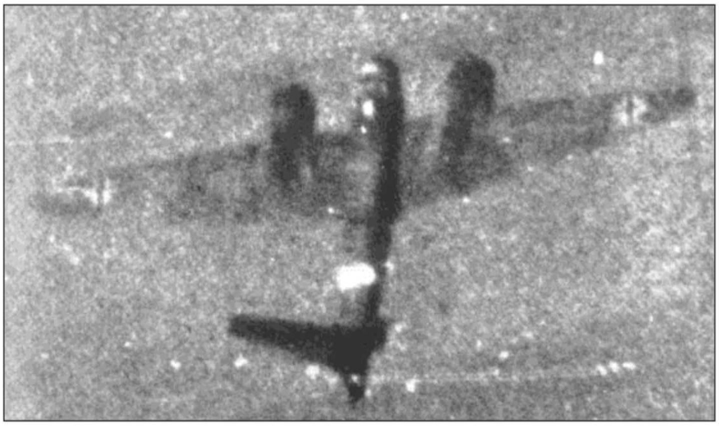
Just over a fortnight later a crew of 3. *Staffel* survived an almost equally harrowing experience, as pilot Leutnant Heinz Unrau recounts:

'While attacking a convoy off the west coast of the Crimea on 15 August we were ourselves attacked by four fighters. As we pulled out of the dive at a height of 800 m, a well-aimed burst of fire from our wireless-operator/air gunner, Feldwebel Winter, forced the pilot of the fighter on our tail to bail out, but the now pilotless machine continued to head straight for us, ramming our tail and causing the right half of the tailplane to break off. What remained of the left half was bent upwards at an angle of about 20 degrees.

'After a lot of initial vibration the machine became very tail heavy. Despite exerting all the pressure I could on the stick – using both hands and one of my feet – the machine continued to climb at a rate of 2-3m/sec at an airspeed of



Back to the heat of a Rumanian summer, made all the hotter by the fire that has broken out in the port engine of this machine of KG 51 at Focsani, and which the field's fire crew is busy smothering with foam. Note the extremely tall ring sight on the weapon mounted in the nose glazing



Although of very poor quality, this shot clearly shows the damage done to the tail of Leutnant Heinz Unrau's aircraft

300 km/h. I was able to counter a simultaneous swing to the left by sideslipping to the right without using the rudder, which had also been damaged and distorted.

'After about 30 minutes I found that I could keep to an altitude of 3000 m by throttling back the engines. Five minutes before reaching the Rumanian coast south of Akkermann the rear fuselage twisted another 20 degrees to an angle of 40-50 degrees. As I now had to reckon with the entire tail unit breaking off at any moment, I gave the order to prepare to bail out.

'As a slight westerly wind was blowing, I tried to keep going as far west as possible. But when more pieces of the tail broke away and a violent shaking and juddering of the stick warned me that the whole tail unit was finally about to part company with the rest of the machine, I ordered the cockpit roof and ventral hatches to be jettisoned. The crew exited the aircraft through the ventral gondola hatch. I was about to follow them when what was left of the tail flew off and the way was clear for me to get out via the roof hatch.

'After what I estimated to be about 20 seconds in free fall, I found that I could move my arms and legs, but as parts of the tail unit were whirling through the air above my head, I delayed opening my parachute until they had fallen past me. The jerk of the canopy's opening was cushioned by my life-jacket, and the shock was quite bearable.

'I made a very soft landing. The rest of the crew came down after me within an area some two kilometres square. The attitude of the local farmers who came hurrying towards us was friendly, and that of the Rumanian soldiers who arrived shortly afterwards very courteous.'

Having survived this incident, Unrau also survived the war. At its close he held the rank of major and was *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./KG 51, flying Me 262s. He would also be one of the last Luftwaffe bomber pilots to be awarded the Knight's Cross, which he received on 1 May 1945.

After nearly six weeks spent busily re-equipping at Wiener Neustadt, III./KG 51 joined the rest of the *Geschwader* in Rumania at the end of August. They took over from II. *Gruppe* at Balti, the latter departing in early September for Wiener Neustadt, where it was to remain for the best part of the next three months. During that time I. and III./KG 51 bore the brunt of bomber operations on the southernmost sector of the front.

One of KG 51's most important contributions to the fighting in this area had been its support of 11. *Armee* as it forced a crossing of the lower Dnieper at Berislav. European Russia's second largest river, the Dnieper is more than 750 yards wide at this point, and the pontoon bridge constructed under heavy artillery fire by German Army pioneers became one of the most hotly contested structures of its kind of the whole war.

The Berislav bridgehead was the jumping-off point for the offensive aimed at capturing the Crimea, and it was to the area between Berislav and the Perekop Isthmus, the narrow tongue of land leading from the

Ukraine down on to the Crimean Peninsula, that the crews of I. and III./KG 51 next turned their attention. Targets included road and rail communications, armoured trains, troop columns and airfields. Despite this support from the air, it would take ground forces a full month to bludgeon their way through the formidable Perekop defences, and by that time KG 51's priorities had changed yet again.

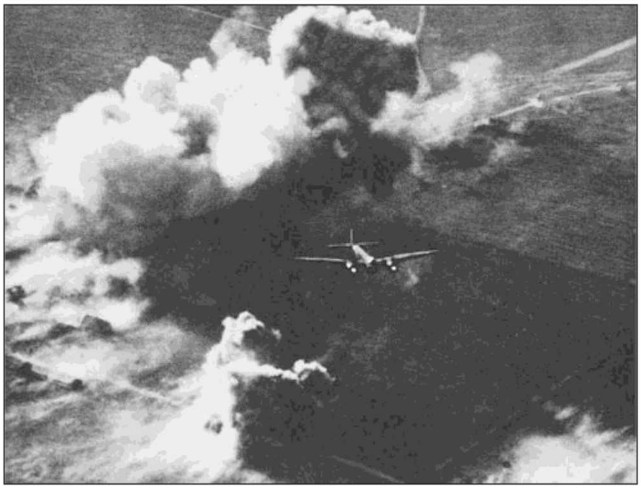
On 13 September – the day Generalfeldmarschall Erich von Manstein assumed command of 11. *Armee* – the *Geschwader* carried out a raid on the Black Sea port of Odessa. The whole of Russia's southwestern front was now on the point of complete collapse. On its right-hand flank the great 'cauldron' battle east of Kiev was at its height. This would end in disaster for the Red Army, with over two-thirds of a million of its troops going into captivity. On the left-hand flank the major Soviet naval base at Odessa had been surrounded and cut off by the Rumanians. Here, the defenders had a means of escape – by sea. To avoid further crippling losses, the Soviet Black Sea Fleet mounted a large-scale evacuation. During the first half of October some 70,000 troops and 15,000 civilians would be transported from Odessa to ports on the Crimea.

KG 51, led since 1 September by Oberst Paul Koester, was tasked with interrupting this traffic. To help it do so, the *Geschwader's* two *Gruppen* were moved forward out of Rumania to two airfields in the Ukraine situated on either side of Odessa. I./KG 51 was transferred to Tiraspol, 60 miles northwest of the port, on 10 October, and III./KG 51 went to Nikolayev, much the same distance to the northeast, two weeks later.

Despite their proximity to the target area, the Ju 88s do not appear to have achieved any spectacular anti-shipping successes, although they did mount raids on Odessa and the ports of disembarkation on the Crimea, including Sevastopol and Feodosia – severe damage was done to docks and other harbour facilities. On 2 November, however, they scored two direct hits on the stern of the modern 8000-ton cruiser *Voroshilov*, berthed at Novorossisk, on the Caucasus coast. The vessel was duly towed further south to Poti, another Soviet Black Sea naval base closer to the Turkish border, where it was to remain under repair until February 1942.

KG 51 would also stay *in situ* on their two Ukrainian airfields for much of the winter of 1941/42. At the beginning of December the *Geschwaderstab* and III. *Gruppe* were joined at Nikolayev by II./KG 51 fresh from re-equipment in Austria. Meanwhile I./KG 51 continued to fly missions out of Tiraspol, weather permitting, until it too was withdrawn from operations early in the new year to rest and re-equip. However, there was to be no return to the Reich and accompanying welcome respite from the harsh conditions of the Russian front – just the short hop down to Odessa, which had finally fallen to the Rumanians on 16 October and was now serving as a 'rear area' base.

A machine of I./KG 51 emerges from the cloud of smoke billowing from the burning Soviet Army HQ on the Perekop Isthmus, which was attacked by the unit on 24 September 1941



Meanwhile, what of the two *Gruppen* of KG 54 that had been operating alongside KG 51 as part of V. *Fliegerkorps* at the start of *Barbarossa*? After little more than a month of hostilities, during which time it had transferred forward from Dubno, in Poland, to Berdichev, in the Northern Ukraine, I./KG 54 had handed its aircraft over to II. *Gruppe* and retired by rail to Ohlau, in Silesia, to receive new Ju 88A-4s.

This left just II./KG 54 as the sole Ju 88 unit supporting *Panzergruppe* 1's continuing advance on Kiev. II./KG 54 had preceded I. *Gruppe* from Dubno to Berdichev in mid-July. As the two Berdichev fields, east and west, were both relatively small – which meant that machines could only take off with reduced bomb loads – part of II./KG 54 had subsequently moved up to Byelaya Zerkov, to the south-southwest of Kiev. Here, they were ideally situated not only to support local ground operations, but also to fly long-range bombing missions against Soviet lines of supply.

These activities resulted in growing casualty lists among both men and machines. Ironically, however, it was not over the Ukraine but back in the homeland that KG 54 came closest to losing its *Kommodore*. Oberstleutnant Otto Höhne was one of the passengers aboard the *Geschwaderstab's* Heinkel He 111D transport machine when it crashed on take-off from Ohlau for a flight to Berdichev on 15 August. Höhne sustained severe injuries. During his lengthy recuperation the position of *Kommodore* was filled by Major Krafft von Dellmensingen, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./KG 54. In the event, Oberstleutnant Höhne was not to return to the *Geschwader*. He would be appointed instead to a number of staff and training posts, spending the latter part of the war as CO of the Luftwaffe's Air Warfare Academy at Fürstenfeldbruck.

By now the battle for Kiev was approaching its climax. On 25 August, the day *Panzergruppe* 2's armoured divisions swung down from the central sector to form the northern pincer of the ring of steel closing behind the Ukrainian capital, II./KG 54 transferred to Zhitomir. A major counter-offensive launched by the Soviet 5th Army in an effort to outflank and cut off the advancing German spearheads was brought to a halt on the afternoon of 28 August when the *Gruppe's* aircraft destroyed the pontoon bridge thrown across the River Desna to the northeast of Kiev. By the following morning, however, the desperate Russians had repaired the bridge, and tanks and motorised infantry were again pouring across it. It took two further attacks by II./KG 54 on 29 August before the Red Army finally abandoned the attempt.

The following day II./KG 54 left Zhitomir for Kirovograd-North. For the next two weeks it was engaged primarily against railway targets, but on 13 September it resumed ground support activities by flying a series of missions aimed at Soviet troop positions near Lubny, southeast of Kiev, only to lose two 6. *Staffel* machines which collided in mid-air when diving too close alongside each other.

It was also near Lubny that leading elements of *Panzergruppen* 1 and 2 made contact just 24 hours later. Kiev was thus encircled, and with it the major

A smiling Hauptmann Hans-Joachim Grundmann, *Staffelkapitän* of 6./KG 51, checks the work being carried out on the starboard propeller mechanism of his A-4. Behind him on the steps of the maintenance platform, the unit's *Spiess*, or 'Chiefy' – note the cuff bands ('piston rings' in Luftwaffe jargon) on his greatcoat – is no doubt relieved that all is well

A captured Soviet Caterpillar tractor is put to good use at Kirovograd-North hauling II./KG 54's aircraft to and from the workshops

part of five Soviet armies. It was these latter, trapped in a vast area to the southeast of the city, which precipitated the largest 'cauldron' battle of the 1941 campaign. At its end, on 27 September, 665,000 Red Army troops had been marched into captivity, leaving behind them 900 armoured vehicles, 3700+ artillery pieces and untold amounts of other war material.

By this time II. *Gruppe* had already reverted to its attacks on the Ukrainian rail network, targeting stations, junctions and marshalling yards in a wide arc stretching from Kharkov down to Krivoi Rog.

On 1 October it was joined by I./KG 54, which flew in to Kirovograd-East after nearly eight weeks spent re-equipping in Silesia. As the month progressed the two *Gruppen* broadened the scope of their bombing raids. As many as three or four sorties a day were flown against local objectives such as enemy strongpoints and other obstacles threatening to hold up Army Group South's progress. But the Ju 88s were also continuing with their medium-range bombing missions aimed at disrupting the enemy's lines of supply, including the rail links between Kharkov, Byelgorod and Izyum. During the latter half of October they began to penetrate even further to the southeast, carrying out raids on Rostov, Taganrog and other targets on the Sea of Azov, as well as on ports and harbours on the eastern Crimea and in the Caucasus. Among the successes claimed during these latter attacks was an unidentified 1500-ton merchantman sunk at Kerch and a floating dock damaged at Novorossisk.

Operations on this scale inevitably resulted in casualties, but their numbers differed markedly between the two *Gruppen*. A 6. *Staffel* Ju 88, brought down by anti-aircraft fire west of Kharkov on 1 October, was the only total loss suffered by II./KG 54 throughout the entire month. By contrast, I. *Gruppe* lost five of its new Ju 88A-4s. More significantly perhaps, two of the five were being flown by *Gruppenkommandeure*.

On 10 October Hauptmann Walter Freimann's B3+EB failed to return from an attack on the Kharkov-Izyum railway line. It was later established that the *Kommandeur's* aircraft had been set upon by Soviet fighters. Freimann was forced to make an emergency landing far behind enemy lines. All four members of the crew managed to escape from the burning machine, but were quickly rounded up. Freimann's replacement, Hauptmann Hans Widmann, lasted exactly a fortnight. The actual cause of his loss remains unknown, he and his crew disappearing while attacking the railway line near Byelgorod.

During Hauptmann Widmann's brief tenure of office I./KG 54 had been transferred from Kirovograd down to Dniepropetrovsk. They were not destined to remain here for long. On 17 November came the order to return to the Reich for further re-equipment. This was no reflection on their recent performance in the east, however, and their new destination was not Ohlau, but Memmingen, in Bavaria. Here, an issue of tropical kit gave more than a hint of where they would be heading next. Just over four weeks later the first of the *Gruppe's* Ju 88s touched down on Sicily.

Having been withdrawn from combat on 9 November, II./KG 54 had also initially been scheduled for service in the Mediterranean. Hopes of exchanging Russian snow for Sicilian sunshine were dashed by the worsening situation on the central sector of the eastern front. After spending seven weeks converting onto the Ju 88A-4 at Landsberg, the *Gruppe* moved back up to Königsberg-Neuhausen on 31 December for 'winterisation' prior to returning to Russia.

Having returned to the Reich, and from there fully expecting to follow I./KG 54 to the Mediterranean, II. *Gruppe* was instead hastily 'winterised' and sent back to the eastern front. Little wonder that these two 'black men' – Luftwaffe parlance for groundcrew in a reference to their black work overalls – look less than pleased as they warm up the starboard engine of one of their charges at a snowbound Orsha-South in early 1942

It was during this phase (or phases, if one accepts Werner Baumbach's chronology) of the air war in the east – from mid-July 1941 until the onset of winter – that the first Knight's Crosses were awarded to members of Ju 88 units on the Russian front. The earliest examples, however, were conferred mainly in recognition of the recipient's previous performance in the night *Blitz* on Britain. The first relating to a specific incident in the war against the Soviets was that awarded posthumously on 21 August to Major Hans Emig, the *Kommandeur* of KGr 806, who had lost his life in the attack on the lock gates of the Stalin Canal two months before.

The first of September's three awards also resulted from one particular incident that was described in detail in a magazine article at the time. Oberfeldwebel Wilhelm Bender had been piloting a Ju 88 of 5./KG 3 on the central sector back in July when, as he was about to dive on the target, his machine was hit by an anti-aircraft shell. The missile came up through the floor of the cockpit, and although it failed to explode, the round ripped open Bender's back and tore off the roof of the canopy as it exited. With the pilot slumped lifeless over the controls, the bomber tipped over onto its right wing and began to plunge earthwards.

After 30 long seconds Bender regained consciousness. His first thoughts were for his crew. 'Don't bail out! It's alright', but only the gunner was there to hear him. The navigator and wireless-operator had both been sucked out of the cockpit when the roof flew off. The gunner tried to staunch the bleeding with a field dressing. It was hopeless. Blood from the gaping wound in Bender's back, stretching from spine to right shoulder, quickly saturated his flying suit. The horrified gunner could only stare at the torn muscles and shattered shoulder blade as the life drained out of his pilot.

But Bender, his face now chalk white, continued to fly the machine with his left hand. At last they reached friendly territory. As they approached the nearest landing ground, Bender's head again fell forward on to his chest. The gunner grabbed the stick and held it steady. With one final

Another magazine cutting, another Knight's Cross award ceremony – but one with a difference. A hospital nurse helps Oberst Wolfgang von Chamier-Glisczinski, *Kommodore* of KG 3, adjust the ribbon of the Knight's Cross around the neck of Oberfeldwebel Wilhelm Bender

effort Bender took control again and somehow managed to make a wheels-up landing before finally passing out. He was still recovering in hospital when his *Geschwaderkommodore*, Oberst von Chamier-Glisczinski, presented him with the Knight's Cross on 8 September.

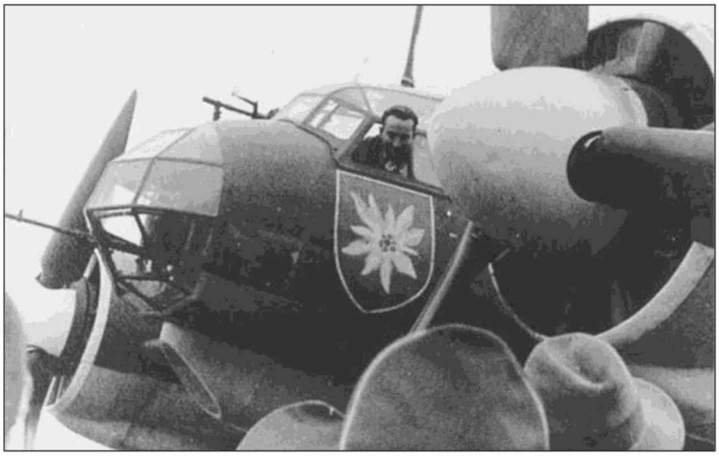
Nine days later Oberleutnant Ernst Petzold, *Staffelkapitän* of 5./KG 54, was awarded his Knight's Cross for a series of highly successful bombing raids in the east, culminating in the destruction of a bridge over the River Dnieper which effectively cut off the escape of large numbers of retreating enemy troops. On 19 September Hauptmann Richard Linke was similarly decorated for his leadership of I./KG 54 in the opening weeks of *Barbarossa*, during which time his *Gruppe* was credited with destroying 240+ aircraft on the ground, together with numerous armoured vehicles. Having been appointed as replacement for the fallen Hans Emig, Linke was actually serving as the *Kommandeur* of KGr 806 at the time of his award. But the future Major Linke would find himself back within the ranks of KG 54 a year hence when his command was redesignated to become that *Geschwader's* new III. *Gruppe*.

The next three Knight's Crosses all went to *Geschwaderkommodores*. Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst Bormann of KG 76 was decorated on 5 October, with KG 77's Oberst Johann Raithel being likewise honoured 12 days later. Oberstleutnant Walter Marienfeld received his Knight's Cross on 27 November, just four days after taking the place of the badly injured Oberstleutnant 'Onkel Otto' Höhne at the head of KG 54.

On 18 December KG 51 celebrated its first Knight's Cross winner of the war when Oberleutnant Matthias Schwegler, the *Kapitän* of 1. Staffel, was decorated for his cumulative anti-shipping successes both in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. A series of damaging raids, the first of them in the night skies of Great Britain and the more recent ones over northern Russian – where he was twice forced to land behind enemy lines and twice returned safely on foot with his crew – won Leutnant Dieter Lukesch of 7./KG 76 his Knight's Cross on 20 December.

But the final decoration of the year went to someone no longer serving on the eastern front. The outspoken Hauptmann Dietrich Peltz was already wearing the Knight's Cross when made *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./KG 77 back in March 1941. For his outstanding achievements in the first months of *Barbarossa* Peltz received the Oak Leaves on 31 December 1941, by which time he was leading the embryonic *Verbandsführerschule Gen. d. Kampfflieger* (Bomber Unit Leaders' School) in Kitzingen.

The first six months of the air war in the east had seen only a handful of Knight's Crosses issued to pilots and commanders of Ju 88 units. However, as the tide turned against the Luftwaffe and the enemy became stronger and operations entailed ever greater dangers, many more such awards would be won, either through exemplary service or by individual acts of courage.



KG 51's first Knight's Cross winner, Oberleutnant Matthias Schwegler, smiles down from his cockpit at a group of well wishers (including at least one civilian – or perhaps an officer in mufti, if the natty headgear at bottom right is anything to go by). 'Teddy' Schwegler would be killed over the Reich just three weeks prior to the end of the war

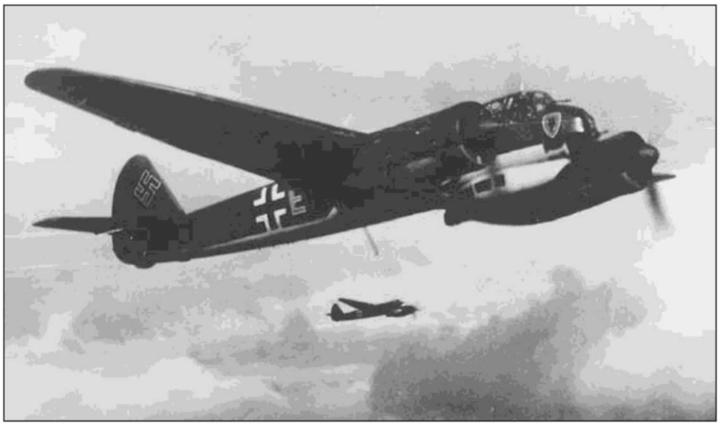
ARCTIC CONVOYS

While the three Army Groups on the main sectors of the eastern front were scything their way through vast tracts of Russian territory, a very different kind of war was being waged above the Arctic Circle. Here, there were no sweeping advances, no armoured pincer movements and no huge cauldron battles involving thousands of troops. The fighting in the far north was to remain virtually static for much of the war. The main features of this campaign were not towns and cities that were captured, held and then lost again, but defensive bunkers and extensive trench systems. It was altogether reminiscent of an earlier conflict. Indeed, replace the Arctic tundra with Flanders mud and the men of General Eduard Dietl's mountain corps (the later 20. *Armee*) could well have been fighting World War 1 all over again.

The background to the air organisation in the northern theatre also differed markedly from that on the main fronts, where each of the three Army Groups had its own attendant Air Fleet providing support. In the north *Luftflotte* 5 was responsible for the whole of German-held Scandinavia. With its units based predominantly in Norway, this Air Fleet's operations had hitherto been directed mainly against the United Kingdom, but with the launching of *Barbarossa*, *Luftflotte* 5 suddenly found itself involved in its own two-front war. In order to discharge its manifold responsibilities it would be divided into three separate territorial *Fliegerführer*. It was one of these, the *Fliegerführer Nord (Ost)*, which was charged with setting up a special operational staff to support the ground units engaged in the assault on northern Russia.

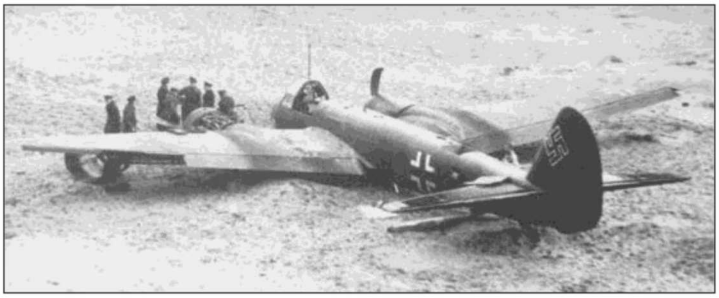
The *Einsatzstab z.b.V. Kirkenes* was, in effect, a small task force. It initially comprised a mix of units, mainly of *Staffel* strength or less, but its striking power was provided by a *Gruppe* of Stukas and the Ju 88s of II./KG 30. The *Einsatzstab's* units were based on a clutch of airfields – some already established, some newly constructed – in northern Norway and Finland. For many, these bases were to become semi-permanent. During the opening stages of *Barbarossa*, aircrews in the Arctic would share none of the heady excitement experienced by their counterparts on the main fighting fronts as they leapfrogged forward from one hastily abandoned Soviet airfield to the next in their efforts to keep pace with the rampaging *Panzergruppen*.

However for II./KG 30 at Banak the movement, or otherwise, of the troops on the ground was of little significance. The *Gruppe's* main targets were the port of Murmansk and the railway running southwards from it down into the heart of the



Aircraft of II./KG 30 ('4D+EN' in the foreground) climb away from Banak *en route* to the Soviet fighter airfields around Murmansk on 22 August 1941

Soviet Union. Unlike Archangel on the shores of the White Sea to the east, which was iced up during the winter months, Murmansk was ice-free all year round. The Russians were only too well aware of the strategic importance of Murmansk – their 'gateway to the outside world' – and the port and its surroundings were well defended both by fighters and a heavy concentration of anti-aircraft guns. In such a relatively small area, the barrage these latter could throw up was truly ferocious, and Murmansk quickly gained the reputation of being a 'thoroughly unhealthy place to be'. One Ju 88 pilot famously remarked that he would rather fly three missions to London than one to Murmansk.



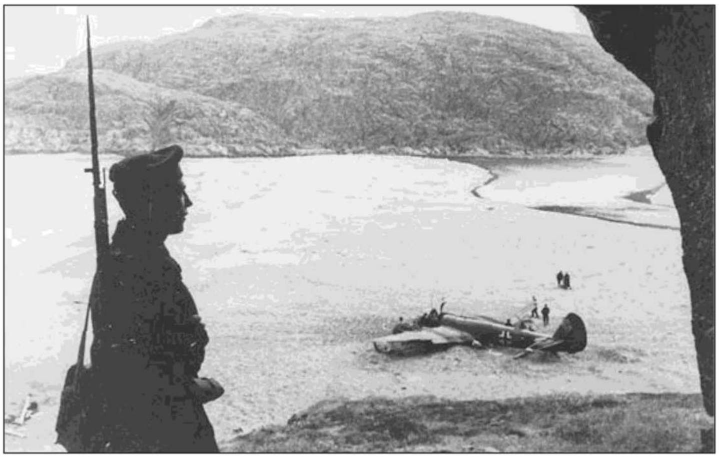
This well-known photograph has been described in the past as the aircraft that gave future Soviet ace Boris Safonov his first victory. However, the picture does not fit the facts. Safonov's victim, a machine of 6./KG 30 piloted by Unteroffizier Reinhard Schellern, reportedly went down into the Kola Inlet, killing the entire crew. The aircraft shown here has clearly come down on dry land (but only just – see photograph below), with the jettisoned cabin canopy seeming to suggest the crew's survival...

Not that the crews of II./KG 30 had any say in the matter. After bad weather had disrupted operations on the opening day of *Barbarossa*, 6. *Staffel* spent much of 23 and 24 June mining the approaches to Murmansk. By the end of those two days they had suffered their first total loss, and every other machine bar one had been damaged by flak.

The *Staffel's* sole casualty had not fallen victim to the port's anti-aircraft batteries. On 24 June Unteroffizier Reinhard Schellern had been sent out on a solo reconnaissance mission to the area northeast of Murmansk. He was sighted near the Russian airfield of Vaenga and a rocket-armed I-16, flown by future Soviet ace Boris Safonov, had been scrambled to give chase. After a laborious climb, the Russian attacked out of the sun, damaging the Ju 88 with one of its rockets. Schellern tried to escape by diving towards the sea, but the I-16 clung to his tail and a burst of machine gun fire sent the bomber into the waters of the Kola Inlet.

II./KG 30's other principal objective, the Murmansk railway, proved far less dangerous a target. Many pilots even confessed to enjoying attacking the Russians' supply line, aiming not merely to destroy a section of track but also to find and derail a train at the same time. The line's anti-aircraft defences were nowhere near as concentrated as those ringing Murmansk, but there *were* a number of Soviet fighter airfields located along its route. Due to the haphazard workings of the enemy's warning system, however, the fighters were often unable to get off the ground in time to intercept the approaching bombers. On these occasions the I-16s – in groups of anything up to 50 machines – would instead be reduced to chasing after the Ju 88s 'like an angry swarm of bees', ready to pounce on any bomber that showed signs of being in trouble and beginning to straggle.

Despite their near obsolescence, a Polikarpov in capable hands could prove more than a match for the Luftwaffe's most modern bomber.



...obviously the same machine – note the bent starboard propeller blade and the dorsal dinghy hatch cover resting on the port tailplane – this wider view shows the site selected for the skilfully executed belly-landing to be a spit of sand and shingle between two bodies of water. A Soviet marine stands guard as intelligence officers inspect their prize. The only questions remaining – exactly where and when was this?

Hauptmann Eberhard Roeger, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./KG 30, was brought down by one near Vaenga on 3 July, but his loss was not allowed to interfere with the tempo of operations. The *Gruppe* continued its strikes against Murmansk, its railway line and the surrounding enemy airfields. Crews were also sent out to attack the Soviets' coastal convoys and their Northern Fleet naval escorts. On 20 July machines of 5. *Staffel* caught and sank the 1660-ton destroyer *Stremilteny* in the Kola Inlet.

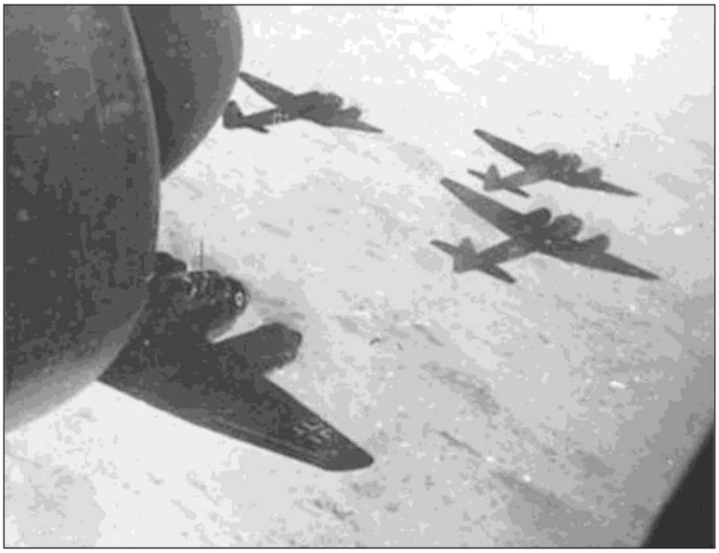
By early August II./KG 30 had been joined at Banak by I. *Gruppe*. The former then returned to Stavanger, in southern Norway, where it flew operations over the North Sea until the end of September. It then retired to Gilze-Rijen, in Holland, to re-equip with Ju 88A-4s before being sent to Orsha on the central sector of the eastern front late in December.

Meanwhile, I./KG 30 was being introduced to the rigours of the Arctic air war the hard way. One of the four Ju 88s lost on 9 August was a machine of 3. *Staffel* claimed by rapidly rising Soviet ace Boris Safonov as his eighth victory. Very soon the *Gruppe* would be confronted by an entirely new enemy – or, to be more accurate, one familiar of old. With his pre-war pact of non-aggression with Hitler rendered meaningless by *Barbarossa*, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin had no hesitation in signing a new pact of mutual assistance offered by Great Britain. In practical terms this 'assistance' was to consist of shipments of war material being despatched to the Soviet Union. It would not be long in coming forth.

On 21 August, less than six weeks after the pact had been signed, a small trial convoy, code-named 'Dervish', set sail from Hvalfjord in Iceland. All seven ships reached Archangel safely ten days later. They had blazed the trail for the first of the now famous 'PQ' convoys that were to follow in their wake in September. That same month two squadrons of RAF Hurricanes arrived at Vaenga to operate alongside the field's resident Red Air Force fighter units.

By this time the midnight sun, which had never dipped below the horizon during the opening weeks of *Barbarossa*, and had thus allowed round-the-clock operations, had given way to the first snowfalls of the year. The Arctic winter was setting in and all flying would soon be severely curtailed. One of the last major engagements of 1941 took place on 6 October during yet another Ju 88 raid on Murmansk. The defenders reported eight of the 25 attacking bombers destroyed, with claims being submitted by anti-aircraft gunners, as well as by both Soviet and RAF fighters. In fact, I./KG 30 recorded the loss of just three Ju 88s.

Throughout the long winter months the PQ convoys continued to deliver their cargos, initially to Archangel and then, when that port became blocked by ice, to Murmansk. The 'only' dangers they faced during this period were the atrocious weather conditions and



A formation of I./KG 30 machines silhouetted against the featureless tundra

the occasional U-boat. They would not be subjected to Luftwaffe attacks until the following spring. By then, however, several changes had taken place in northern Norway and Finland. The *Einsatzstab z.b.V. Kirkenes* had been disbanded and the *Fliegerführer Nord (Ost)* had assumed direct control of air operations in those areas. Also, I./KG 30 – whose strength had sunk to just seven aircraft in January – was reinforced early in 1942 by the arrival at Banak of Hauptmann Hajo Herrmann's III./KG 30.

But when the two *Gruppen* began their anti-shipping operations in earnest in March, one of the first missions flown was to be directed not against Allied merchantmen, but a warship of the Royal Navy. Convoy PQ 12 had departed Reykjavik on 1 March bound for Murmansk. British intelligence was aware that the German battleship *Tirpitz* had been ordered to put to sea to intercept the 16-vessel convoy. Capital ships of the Home Fleet were therefore shadowing it in support, hoping to bring the *Tirpitz* – sister ship of the ill-fated *Bismarck* – to bay and send her to the bottom too. To counter this perceived threat, aircraft of KG 30 were sent out from Banak on 9 March with orders to sink HMS *Victorious*, the only aircraft carrier included in the British task force. Despite poor weather, three Ju 88s managed to find her but failed to achieve any hits.

KG 30 was to have more success towards the end of the month after a Bv 138 reconnaissance flying boat reported sighting the next Allied convoy on the morning of 27 March. Weather conditions had since gone from bad to worse and PQ 13 had already endured 36 hours facing the full fury of an Arctic storm. This had resulted in the vessels splitting up into small groups, and was no doubt a contributory factor to 'Unlucky 13's' becoming the first Arctic convoy to be severely mauled (during the 12 previous convoys only one ship had been lost, sunk by a U-boat). Five of PQ 13's 19 merchantmen would fall victim to enemy action, two of them being despatched by aircraft of III./KG 30.

It was shortly after midday on 28 March that they caught and sank a solitary straggler, the Panamanian-registered *Raceland*. Seven hours later, in the last of the day's twilight, they chanced upon another singleton. Having made good progress despite the storm, the *Empire Ranger* was the leading ship of the scattered convoy. It went down only 200 miles north-northwest of the Kola Inlet. Nor did PQ 13's torment end there. Two of the convoy's survivors, the *Empire Starlight* and the *New Westminster City*, would be destroyed in bombing raids after reaching Murmansk.

The Allied convoys were now being given priority over all other targets in the Arctic theatre. The importance attached to the disruption of this vital seaborne supply route was underlined by the return of II./KG 30 to Banak in late March. For the first time *Geschwaderkommodore* Major Erich Bloedorn had all three *Gruppen* of his command together in the far north as the Luftwaffe awaited the next convoy. But of the 24 ships of PQ 14 that left Iceland on 8 April, 16 were forced to turn back due to ice and weather. Of the remaining eight, only one was sunk (by a U-boat), while five Ju 88s were lost in several unsuccessful attacks.

The Arctic convoys were organised to operate in 'pairs', however, with the return sailing of ships that had arrived earlier in Russia and had since discharged their cargos being timed to coincide with the despatch of an outbound convoy. Thus, the 16 ships of PQ 14's 'paired' convoy left Murmansk just 48 hours after the former had left Reykjavik, in Iceland.

An aircraft of II./KG 30 runs up its engines at Banak. Despite the amount of ordnance lying scattered around, it has been suggested that all-white fuselage codes such as those carried by this A-4 were used to identify machines engaged primarily on maritime reconnaissance duties

The returning vessels, sailing as QP 10, were not to escape so lightly, losing four of their number.

Two of the four were claimed by the Ju 88s of KG 30. II. *Gruppe* bombed and sank the *Empire Cowper* just a day out of Murmansk, but paid heavily for this success. Three of their machines were shot down by anti-aircraft fire from the convoy's naval escorts. Others were damaged, including that of the *Gruppenkommandeur*, Hauptmann Sigmund-Ulrich *Freiherr* von Gravenreuth, who was seriously wounded. Two days later, on 13 April, another Ju 88 scored a direct hit on the stern of the *Harpalion*. Rendered unmanageable by the loss of her rudder, she had to be sunk by gunfire from an escort vessel. It was a sad end for the two vessels, for both were survivors of the earlier punishment – natural and man-made – that had been meted out to PQ 13.

Another ship that had survived PQ 13, although only just, was the Royal Navy's 8000-ton cruiser HMS *Trinidad*. By an ironic twist of fate she had managed to torpedo herself during a surface engagement with three German destroyers on 29 March. The cause of this unfortunate incident was variously attributed to a faulty torpedo circling back on itself, or the toppling of the gyro that controlled the weapon's direction system as it passed through a shell splash. After makeshift repairs in Russia, *Trinidad* – with an escort of four destroyers – sailed for Iceland on 13 May. A Luftwaffe reconnaissance machine spotted the small force the following day and it was attacked late that same evening by Ju 88s of KG 30 and by He 111 torpedo-bombers of KG 26.

It was while the cruiser's anti-aircraft gunners were concentrating their fire on the eight low-flying Heinkels emerging from the glare of the midnight sun that a lone Junkers dived out of the thin cloud overhead to release its full load of four bombs. These had a devastating effect, starting numerous fires and tearing off the temporary plates that had been attached to the ship's port side. Belching smoke, she began to settle by the bow. After surviving members of her crew had been taken off, one of the attendant destroyers put three torpedoes into *Trinidad's* starboard side, sending the blazing cruiser to the bottom in the early hours of 15 May.

Two PQ convoy battles would be fought in May. In the first of them PQ 15 lost three merchantmen, but all were credited to KG 26's torpedo-carrying He 111s. The only 'success' that KG 30 could lay claim to was a near miss, which damaged the naval trawler *Cape Palliser* on 3 May. For the next three weeks (apart from the attack on *Trinidad*) the *Geschwader* directed most of its energies against land targets, adding the power station at Murmashi, southwest of Kola, to its usual list of objectives.

Then, on 25 May, aerial reconnaissance reported the approach of the next convoy. The 35 ships of PQ 16, which had put out from Reykjavik four days earlier, constituted the largest Arctic convoy to date. It elicited a swift and equally strong response from the Luftwaffe, although this time it was the torpedo-bombers of KG 26 that made up the bulk of the initial attacking force. They got a hot reception. Not a single Heinkel scored a hit and one was lost to a Hurricane launched from a CAM ship. The half-dozen Ju 88s of III./KG 30 fared marginally better. Although two of the Junkers were brought down by the concentrated barrage of anti-aircraft fire that greeted them, a near miss immobilised the American merchantman *Carlton*, which had to be towed back to Iceland.

Sporadic air attacks on the convoy during 26 May proved ineffective. But it was to be a different story 24 hours later when PQ 16 was subjected to an assault by wave after wave of German aircraft. The vast majority of these were Ju 88s of KG 30. Records indicate that the *Geschwader* in fact flew 100+ individual sorties on 27 May. By now the ships were southeast of Bear Island. The day was fine and clear, with a light westerly ruffling the surface of the sea – a far cry from the Arctic storm that had battered PQ 13 two months before. Although the main cloud base was at 3000 ft, a thin veil of stratus at half that height sufficed to hide the diving Ju 88s from the vessels until they were almost on top of them.

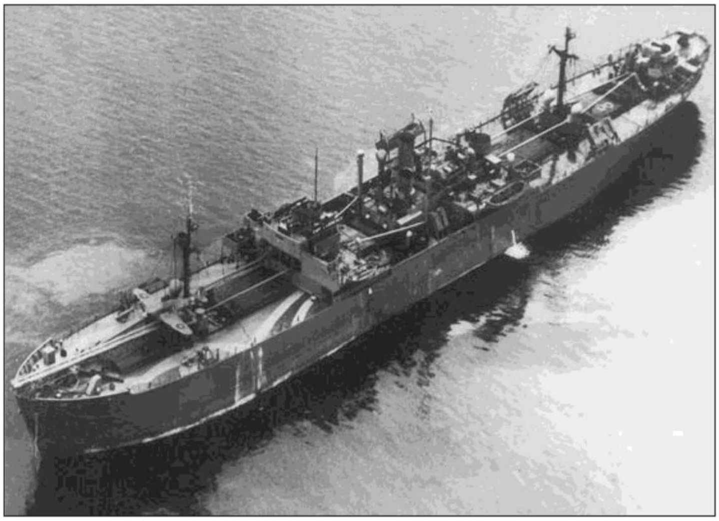
Their first victims were the Russian freighter *Stary Bolshevik* and one of the escorting destroyers, the Polish *Garland*, which they attacked at around midday. Although damaged, the two ships would survive. Not so the American merchantmen *Alamar* and *Mormacsul*, caught by a second wave of bombers about an hour later. Both went down. Next, a vic of three Ju 88s hit the *Empire Lawrence*, the CAM ship whose Hurricane had claimed the Heinkel two days earlier. The stricken vessel, already starting to settle, was then blown apart by a stick of four more bombs from another Junkers that appeared out of the clouds just minutes later. These attacks also damaged the *Empire Baffin* and the American *City of Joliet*, the latter so badly that she was briefly abandoned, and then re-boarded, only to sink in the early hours of the following morning.

The last ship of PQ 16 to succumb to KG 30's bombs was yet another of the British Ministry of Shipping's 'Empire' vessels, the *Empire Purcell*, which blew up with a tremendous explosion at around 2000 hrs.

It was while the convoy's anti-aircraft gunners were focusing their attention on the Ju 88s that a small group of wave-hugging He 111s achieved their only success of the day, putting two torpedoes into the *Lowther Castle*, which burned for eight hours before also exploding.

KG 30's parting shot of 27 May left another merchantman, the *Ocean Voice*, badly damaged, but eventually able to continue on her way. Bad weather the following day kept air operations to a minimum. The few missions that *were* flown produced no results, and three separate attacks by KG 30 on 29 May proved equally fruitless.

By this time PQ 16 had split into two, with the larger group making for Murmansk and the smaller



The 7457-ton CAM ship *Empire Lawrence*, which was sunk during the PQ 16 convoy battle. Note the disruptive camouflage on her foredeck and the Sea Hurricane I sitting on the bow catapult

contingent heading further east to Archangel, which, with the break up of the winter ice, was now open to navigation again.

On 30 May, while the Archangel group steamed on down into the White Sea completely unmolested, the ships bound for Murmansk were subjected to three last dive-bombing attacks by the Junkers of KG 30. None of the vessels was hit, but two Ju 88s were reported lost on this date. It is possible that one of them – or maybe even both – had fallen to the guns of Boris Safonov. The Soviet ace was certainly in action against a formation of Ju 88s that was harassing a group of ships off Kola Inlet on the morning of 30 May – in fact, he was heard over the radio claiming three of the bombers shot down before he himself disappeared (it is believed that Safonov was forced to ditch with a damaged engine). At the time of his loss Boris Safonov was credited with 26 kills (including six shared) over the Arctic, of which 12 (three shared) had been Ju 88s.

The six-day battle of PQ 16 did not end there. Luftwaffe forces next concentrated on trying to prevent the supplies that had been delivered to Murmansk and Archangel from being transported any further. On 1 June a series of small-scale raids on vessels unloading in Murmansk harbour resulted in the sinking of two ships (one a much-bombed veteran of the earlier PQ 13). Magnetic mines were also air-dropped in and around Murmansk, these resulting in the destruction of at least two more Arctic convoy survivors before June was out. KG 30's crews also targeted the railway system carrying the supplies to the south, 17 Ju 88s bombing the station at Louhi, close to the shores of the White Sea, on 13 June. However the strengthening of Soviet fighter defences along this important stretch of line was making such missions increasingly hazardous. Another attack by KG 30 on a railway bridge in the same area two days later led to a running battle in which one Ju 88 was downed and two others seriously damaged.

It was not long before the first reports of the next convoy began coming in. The 36 merchantmen, most of them American, that made up PQ 17 had sailed from Iceland's Hvalfjord on 27 June. All but eight of them were bound for Archangel, as Murmansk was 'almost at a standstill' after recent heavy bombing. On 18 June, in an operation aimed at incapacitating the port's work force, some 12,000 incendiary bombs had been showered on the town, reducing almost half of it to ruin.

At first the convoy's progress followed a familiar pattern. After five days spent ploughing eastwards, PQ 17 suffered its first attack from the air on the evening of 2 July. This was delivered by nine torpedo-carrying He 115 floatplanes, but failed to inflict any damage. The ships reaped the benefit of low-lying fog for much of the next 24 hours. Then, early on the morning of 4 July, the He 115s found them again, this time putting a torpedo into a US merchantman. This vessel would later be sent to the bottom by a U-boat, a fate awaiting many of the ships damaged by air attack in the days ahead. That same evening, just after 2000 hrs, He 111 torpedo-bombers of I./KG 26 claimed three successes. A simultaneous dive-bombing attack by Ju 88s of KG 30 produced no hits at all, however. This air assault had undoubtedly been a blow, but it was hardly a fatal one. Yet two hours later the convoy was ordered to scatter. Why?

It was the result of a decision that had been taken in London, and one that remains controversial to this day. The Admiralty firmly believed that PQ 17 was in imminent danger of surface attack from a powerful German

Boris Safonov was squadron commander of 72nd SAP of the Northern Fleet Air Force at Vaenga airfield. The leading ace on the northern front during the first year of the war, he had been credited with 26 victories by the time he perished in combat on 30 May 1942. Most of these successes came in the I-16, and his tally included no fewer than 12 Ju 88s destroyed

battle group led by the battleship *Tirpitz*. Their Lordships consequently despatched three brief but startling signals. The first effectively denuded the convoy of its main naval support force. Timed at 2111 hrs, it read: 'Secret and Most Immediate. Cruiser force withdraw to westward at high speed'. Although the Royal Navy warships were being ordered to reverse course in order to engage the enemy presumed to be bearing down on the convoy – and to do so 'at high speed' to minimise the danger from lurking U-boats – their hasty departure did little to instil confidence in the crews of the merchantman (in fact it aroused extremely bitter feelings, not least the charge of 'turning and running').

A second signal received 12 minutes later only served to fuel the flames. 'Secret and Immediate. Owing to threat from surface ships convoy is to disperse and proceed to Russian ports.' 30 minutes later still came the even more alarming 'Secret. Most Immediate. Convoy is to scatter'. The smaller naval vessels of the close escort were still with the convoy, and it was this last message that resulted in the senior officer's hoisting the visual signal to scatter at about 2215 hrs. After some initial reluctance, the masters of the merchant ships began to comply.

Some five hours later the Admiralty came close to admitting that it had blundered with a further signal. 'It is presumed enemy ships are north of Tromsö, but it is not, repeat not, certain they are at sea'. By then it was too late. Convoy PQ 17 as such was no more. Although well past Bear Island when the order to scatter was given, Archangel still lay some 800 miles away. Therefore, most ships – with the exception of a small group that opted to head north into the pack ice and sit it out until the reported danger had passed – chose to set course east-southeast at top speed, either singly or in twos and threes, and head for the large island of Novaya Zemlya, which was a good 200 miles closer.

Air reconnaissance soon reported the astonishing fact that the convoy appeared to be breaking up. It was now that the three *Gruppen* of Major Erich Bloedorn's Banak-based KG 30 came into their own. Throughout 5 July they were in the air almost without pause, flying one mission after the other in the hunt for individual ships.

One of their first victims was the elderly American freighter *Pankraft*, which was quickly discovered amid the loose floes bordering the pack ice. A near miss from a high-altitude bomb brought her to a stop. She was then set on fire by low-level strafing. Abandoned by her crew, the *Pankraft*, which had 5000 tons of TNT in her holds, burned for nearly two days before blowing herself apart. In mid-afternoon of 5 July another group of Ju 88s found and attacked two more US merchantmen. The *Fairfield City* went down almost at once, but the *Daniel Morgan* escaped into the mist lying to the east. She was not to survive for long, being pounced upon by yet more marauding Ju 88s. Although the vessel's gun crew claimed to have downed two of her five attackers, she was herself badly damaged and then finished off by a shadowing U-boat .

These last two American ships had already made it nearly halfway to Novaya Zemlya. At about the same time as they went under, but much further to the northwest, the *Earlston* was attracting the attention both of a *Staffel* of KG 30 machines and a trio of U-boats. The lone British merchantman stood no chance. A near miss by one of the former caused multiple fractures in the vessel's pipework, and a torpedo from a surfaced

U-boat broke her cleanly in two. Two hours after this, at about 1700 hrs, four Ju 88s made a high-altitude bombing run on the *Peter Kerr*. The US Liberty ship took three direct hits and exploded within minutes.

Meanwhile, back close to the edge of the pack ice, 200 miles north of where the *Peter Kerr* met her end, a group of three merchantmen was coming under attack from machines of III./KG 30. The American *Washington* was lifted clear out of the water by the force of the bombs detonating in the sea all around her. As she began to go down, her crew took to the boats. Like those of the *Peter Kerr*, they were able to pull away before she blew up. Now it was the turn of the other two ships. The British *Bolton Castle* erupted as a direct hit turned her into an inferno. Incredibly, her crew also escaped without a single loss, as did those of the Dutch *Paulus Potter*, which was disabled by several near misses to be left a smoking, drifting wreck. The *Bolton Castle* soon joined the *Washington* on the bottom, but the abandoned hulk of the *Paulus Potter* remained afloat for eight days before being despatched by a prowling U-boat.

The last two ships to be claimed by KG 30 on this incredible day were not merchant vessels. The *Aldersdale* was a fleet oiler (although on this voyage part of her cargo of oil was intended for the Russians). On the evening of 5 July she was attacked by four Ju 88s, one of which laid a stick of bombs across her stern. While efforts were being made to take her in tow, bombs from another Junkers straddled a smaller vessel nearby. This was the *Zaafaran*, one of the three rescue ships that had sailed with the convoy for the express purpose of picking up survivors. Now she herself was going down. Luckily, all but one of her crew and the many merchant seamen she had already rescued were saved. In the meantime the *Aldersdale* had had to be abandoned. Two days later her derelict hulk became yet another of KG 30's victims sent to the bottom by a U-boat.

6 July again found the crews of KG 30 out over the Barents Sea searching for merchantmen. One they chanced upon was the American *Pan Atlantic*, steaming south at full speed for the entrance to the White Sea. A single Ju 88 dived on the vessel, placing a bomb in one of her forward holds. Her cargo of cordite exploded, blowing her bows off. Within three minutes the *Pan Atlantic* had disappeared beneath the waves. Not far away, other Ju 88s found and attacked two Russian ships, damaging the tanker *Donbass* and sinking a small naval patrol vessel.

By this stage most of the surviving ships of PQ 17 were at last nearing Novaya Zemlya. Their intention was to hole up for the time being in Matochkin Strait – or 'Funk Creek' as it was soon dubbed – the narrow stretch of water that bisected the island. The ruse clearly worked, for finding no more ships at sea the Germans concluded that the convoy had been totally annihilated. On 7 July KG 30 reverted to the bombing of Murmansk and its surroundings.

But when the merchantmen sheltering in Matochkin Strait decided to risk the final dash down along the coast of Novaya Zemlya into the White Sea, they were quickly spotted by patrolling U-boats and the aircraft of KG 30 were ordered out after them again. The bombers' task was made easier by the fact that an extensive ice field was blocking the direct approach to the White Sea. In order to circumnavigate this obstacle, the vessels were forced to steer a southwesterly course, bringing them ever closer to the Luftwaffe's bases in northern Norway and Finland.

Following the successful PQ 17 action, a ceremonial parade was held at Banak to honour KG 30's three new Knight's Cross winners. Seen here in the centre of the photograph saluting the assembled ranks, they are Hauptmann Konrad Kahl (leading the trio), Hauptmann Erich Stoffregen (almost completely hidden behind Kahl) and Hauptmann Willi Flechner (right). Also just visible on the extreme left is Generaloberst Jürgen Stumpff, GOC *Luftflotte* 5, and (third from left) Oberstleutnant Erich Bloedorn, the *Geschwaderkommodore* of KG 30

KG 30 utilised the situation to the full, sending out nearly 50 machines to scour the edges of the ice field. The merchantmen had nowhere to hide. Their only option was to fight it out, which is exactly what the leading group of five ships tried to do after being detected by a formation of Ju 88s. It was an unequal contest, with the bombers attacking in waves, each one coming in at a different angle from the last in order to fragment the defenders' fire. Three bombs exploded close alongside the American *Hoosier*, which slowly started to go down. Shortly afterwards, at about 0200 hrs on 10 July, the Panamanian-registered *El Capitan* was also near-missed. She struggled on, only to be hit by a single Ju 88 hours later. Now disabled, she too – like the *Hoosier* – gradually began to sink on an even keel. Both vessels, barely afloat, would later succumb to U-boat torpedoes.

They were the last ships of PQ 17 to be lost. Although aircraft of KG 30 flew further search missions on 10 July, and were out again the following day, all they could claim were two vessels damaged during a sustained attack by a dozen or more bombers on a small group of ships around midday on 11 July.

One final mission was mounted later that same afternoon, only to run into long-range fighters of the Red Air Force. Although the Ju 88s had already seen action against the Russian navy – having damaged two Soviet destroyers that had put to sea to guide in a previous group of survivors 24 hours earlier – they were caught off-guard by the unexpected appearance of the twin-engined Petlyakov Pe-2s. In the fight that ensued 1./KG 30 lost their *Staffelkapitän*, Hauptmann Eberhard Schröder. His was the last of ten Luftwaffe machines reportedly shot down during the PQ 17 battle.

In Germany the battle was hailed as an overwhelming success. It received banner headlines in the newspapers and dramatic footage of exploding and sinking ships filmed by the crews of KG30 was shown in cinema newsreels throughout the Reich. The *Geschwader's* performance also resulted in a flurry of awards, among them Knight's Crosses for Hauptleute Konrad Kahl and Erich Stoffregen, *Gruppenkommandeure* of I. and II./KG 30, respectively (III. *Gruppe's* Hajo Herrmann was already wearing the coveted decoration, which he had won in October 1940). *Staffelkapitän* of 5./KG 30, Hauptmann Willi Flechner, was similarly honoured.

In London the repercussions from PQ 17 were very different. Although it had been a catastrophe largely of its own making, the

Ju 88A-4 '4D+CP' of 6./KG 30, pictured while on detachment to Nurmoila, in southeast Finland, during the late summer/early autumn of 1942

Admiralty decreed that no further convoys would be sent to Russia until summer's round-the-clock hours of daylight began to give way to the darkness of autumn. It would thus be nearly two months before the next convoy braved the passage to Archangel.

KG 30 was to spend much of this intervening period attacking ground targets. Almost from the very start of *Barbarossa*, elements of the *Geschwader* had operated out of central Finland in a series of temporary deployments, either to attack the southerly stretches of the Murmansk railway or in support of local actions by German and Finnish troops.

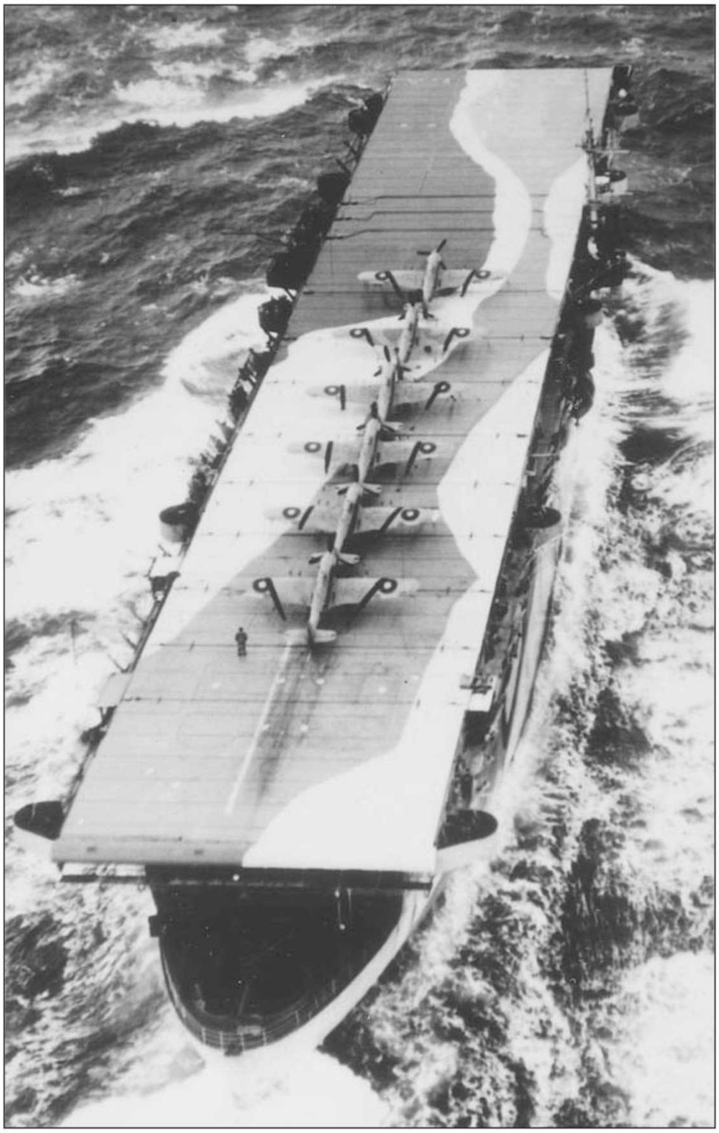
On 19 August II. *Gruppe* was transferred in its entirety from Banak down to Kemi. The purpose of the move was to carry out a fire-raid on Archangel similar to that which had earlier destroyed much of Murmansk. The White Sea port had not been subjected to any major air raids in the past because of the distances involved, and its defenders were therefore taken by surprise when the 19 Ju 88s of II./KG 30 arrived overhead during the night of 25/26 August. All the bombers returned to Kemi, reporting that their incendiaries had caused widespread fires. However two machines despatched 48 hours later to assess the exact extent of the damage failed to return. The crew of one, which had force-landed deep in enemy territory, returned on foot. The other, flown by recent Knight's Cross winner Willi Flechner, was rammed by a Soviet fighter.

Exactly a week later the next Arctic convoy set sail. In an attempt to hoodwink the Germans, who were closely watching Iceland, most of the 40 ships of PQ 18 departed from Loch Ewe, in northern Scotland. Another innovation was the inclusion, for the first time, of an aircraft carrier as part of their escort. HMS *Avenger* was no large fleet carrier, but a light escort carrier, a class of vessel created by affixing a flightdeck atop the hull of a merchant ship. Her complement of aircraft comprised just six Sea Hurricanes and three Swordfish anti-submarine biplanes. Although few in number, this was a distinct improvement on the single, expendable Hurricane perched on the catapult of a CAM ship. Despite displaying the inevitable signs of inexperience associated with any pioneering venture, *Avenger* would play a large part in breaking up attacks on the convoy, both from the air and from under the sea.

She would have her work cut out, for changes had also been taking place among the ranks of the Luftwaffe units poised in northern Norway. Arguably the most important of these was the arrival at Banak early in September of III./KG 26, equipped with torpedo-carrying Ju 88s.

Here is yet another instance where available sources of reference differ widely. Some maintain that the torpedo-armed Junkers had been sent to the Arctic much earlier, and that they had already participated in the attacks on PQ 17 – and even PQ 16. This seems doubtful, as the III./KG 26 of summer 1942 (the third such unit, incidentally, to operate under this designation) was a standard *Kampfgruppe* that was to be renumbered at the beginning of July to become I./KG 1. The newcomer to the Arctic is much more likely to have been the ex-KGr 506, previously a coastal unit, which was withdrawn from service to re-equip and retrain for the torpedo role. Indeed, it was this *Gruppe* that was redesignated as the fourth, and final, III./KG 26 while under training in July.

Whatever their past history, the arrival of Hauptmann Klaus-Wilhelm Nocker's Ju 88s could not have come at a more opportune moment –



The escort carrier HMS *Avenger* with her full complement of six Sea Hurricanes from 883 Naval Air Squadron embarked. Note the special 'Arctic' camouflage applied to her flightdeck for the PQ 18 operation. *Avenger* was sunk by U-boat U-155 during the early hours of 15 November 1942 while escorting convoy MKF 1(Y) off the Portuguese coast. A single torpedo hit the ship's bomb room and ignited the munitions stored there, causing numerous secondary explosions. With her back broken, the carrier sunk in under five minutes, taking 68 officers and 446 ratings with it

although this might well have been the result of Luftwaffe foresight rather than pure chance. The doubling of numbers of torpedo aircraft in the far north also heralded a role reversal for KG 30. The crews that had been largely instrumental in 'annihilating' PQ 17 would find themselves acting as little more than a back-up force in attacks on PQ 18, flying high-altitude bombing missions to disrupt the convoy's defences while KG 26's torpedo-bombers went in at low level.

The battle for PQ 18 opened on the morning of 13 September with two merchantmen being sent to the bottom by U-boats. An attack by KG 30 early that same afternoon produced no results other than the launching of several of *Avenger's* Sea Hurricanes in an abortive attempt to see them off. It was the massed assault an hour later by the torpedo-bombers of KG 26 (28 He 111s and 18 Ju 88s in all), supported by high-altitude bombing runs by aircraft of KG 30, that did the damage. In the space of less than 15 minutes no fewer than eight of the remaining 38 merchant ships had been sunk or were sinking. It is not possible to state with certainty which had fallen victim to Heinkels and which to the Junkers. What is known, however, is that five of the attackers were lost.

14 September began very much as the day before, with another merchantman being claimed by a U-boat in the early hours. But it was to end with just one further vessel sunk in a series of air attacks that cost the Luftwaffe 17 aircraft destroyed and nine seriously damaged. Hardest hit was III./KG 26, which had specifically targeted *Avenger* shortly after midday. 11 of the Gruppe's Ju 88s failed to return from this mission. A machine of KG 30 was also brought down during a dive-bombing attack not long afterwards.

Then, at 1405 hrs, two more waves of torpedo-aircraft from KG 26, this time 22 Heinkels and another 18 of III. *Gruppe's* Junkers, attacked the convoy head-on. Split up by a fierce anti-aircraft barrage from the forward escorts and chased by four of *Avenger's* Sea Hurricanes – three of which were shot down by 'friendly fire' from the merchant ships' gunners – the carefully coordinated attack came apart at the seams. Many aircraft dropped their torpedoes at random, some did not release at all. A single

Laden with ammunition, the American Liberty ship *Mary Luckenbach* 'erupted with an enormous explosion, sending a huge column of flames and smoke towering into the sky'

missile sped down between the columns of merchantmen before hitting the *Mary Luckenbach*, which 'erupted in an enormous explosion, sending a huge column of flames and smoke towering into the sky'.

Intermittent air attacks continued over the next three days, but it was not until shortly after 0600 hrs on 18 September that the Luftwaffe claimed its last victim, the *Kentucky* going down after being hit by a torpedo and two bombs. KG 26's torpedo-bombers were subsequently credited with ten of the 13 merchant ships sunk during the battle for PQ 18. But this success was offset by the loss of 38 of its own aircraft. KG 30's casualties totalled six.

If PQ 17 had been the high point of the Ju 88's anti-shipping war in the far north, then PQ 18 was to be its swansong. Never again would the Arctic theatre witness such sustained and violent action. In the wake of the PQ 18 battle all three *Gruppen* of KG 30 gathered at Kemi with the intention of resuming the raids on Archangel. Worsening weather put paid to these plans, and on 24 September III./KG 30 was transferred back to Nautsi, southwest of Petsamo. Poor conditions kept the *Geschwader's* machines on the ground for much of the time during the next four weeks, but news of another convoy apparently assembling in Iceland prompted I. and II./KG 30's return to northern Norway on 20 October.

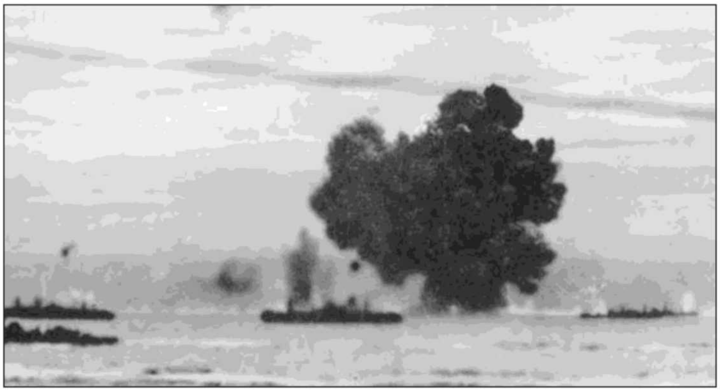
In the event, convoy PQ 19 was never despatched. Instead, between 29 October and 2 November, in what was known as 'Operation *FB*', individual merchantmen were sent out from Iceland at approximately 12-hour intervals to make the voyage to Russia some 200 miles apart. Incredibly, many got through, but luck did not favour one Soviet vessel. The *Dekabrist*, a veteran of PQ 6, was sunk by Ju 88s of I./KG 30 on 4 November. Aircraft of II. *Gruppe* damaged two other ships.

Events far removed from the icy wastes of the Barents Sea would now come to bear. On 8 November Anglo-American forces landed in northwest Africa. German countermeasures included stripping *Luftflotte* 5 of almost its entire bomber strength. Within days the two *Gruppen* of KG 26, together with II. and III./KG 30, were *en route* for the Mediterranean. This left just I./KG 30 to maintain some semblance of an offensive posture in the far north by mounting smaller-scale raids on the *Geschwader's* 'traditional' targets in and around the Murmansk area.

Having to shoulder the full burden of the bomber war above the Arctic Circle, I./KG 30 was often called upon to deploy its individual *Staffeln* on airfields far apart. December saw the *Gruppe's* strength divided between Kemi, Kemijärvi and Nautsi. By mid-January 1943 1. and 3. *Staffeln* were both at Kemi, while 2. *Staffel* had made the short hop from Nautsi up to Petsamo.

By this time, however, the regular Arctic convoys had started running again (albeit under a new designation system, the first of the new series being sent to Russia as JW 51 and the corresponding return convoy being coded RA 51). So when, on 23 January 1943, air

Anti-aircraft bursts pockmark the sky and debris rains back down into the sea as a tremendous explosion marks the end of yet another PQ 18 merchantman



reconnaissance reported sighting a group of more than a dozen eastbound vessels – this being convoy JW 52 six days out of Loch Ewe – all three *Staffeln* of I./KG 30 were immediately rushed back up to Banak. They then proceeded to carry out a series of attacks on the heavily escorted merchantmen over the course of the next two days. But none was successful, and the *Gruppe* was lucky to escape with only one aircraft lost.

II./KG 30 returned to Petsamo early in February, only for a Bv 138 reconnaissance flying boat to discover and report the next Russia-bound convoy on the 23rd, exactly one month after the last. Again the Ju 88s at Banak were sent out to attack the merchant ships, but convoy JW 53 had been provided with an even stronger escort. The ten bombers that dived through the inferno of anti-aircraft fire on 25 February nonetheless claimed a near miss on one British merchantman. A follow-up attack 24 hours later had to return empty-handed. On 5 March a dozen Ju 88s struck at the homebound RA 53. This attack also foundered in the face of an intense anti-aircraft barrage. However a raid on Murmansk the next day inflicted extensive damage on one of the recent JW 53 arrivals. In another raid on the port a week later, aircraft of KG 30 finally sank the *Ocean Freedom*, a seasoned veteran of the 'Kola Run' that had somehow survived the *Geschwader's* attentions during the historic PQ 17 action.

The Arctic convoys were suspended for the next nine months, with JW 54 not departing Loch Ewe until mid-November 1943. By then I./KG 30 would no longer be on hand to contest its passage. In the aftermath of JW 53 the *Gruppe* had continued to mount sporadic attacks on the convoy's vessels as they unloaded at Murmansk. On 4 April a Ju 88 scored a direct hit on the merchantman that had suffered the near miss at sea back on 25 February. The elderly *Dover Hill* seemed to bear a charmed life, however. The bomb failed to explode, and she would finally end her days as one of the blockships sunk off the Normandy beachhead shortly after D-Day to form part of the vast 'Mulberry' artificial harbour.

I./KG 30's next priority was, as usual, to prevent the supplies that had been landed at Murmansk from being transported any further. In an attempt to accomplish this they carried out a number of small raids on the railway leading south out of the port. Included among their targets were the station at Kandalaksha and the many Soviet fighter airfields that now protected this vital stretch of track skirting the shores of the White Sea. But the *Gruppe's* days in the far north were already numbered, for even as its Ju 88s were bombing the Murmansk railway, the last Axis troops were surrendering in North Africa. When Anglo-American forces invaded Sicily on 10 July, I./KG 30's time had finally come. Within hours they vacated Banak for Trondheim on the first leg of their long flight south to join the rest of the *Geschwader* in the Mediterranean.

The departure of I./KG 30 meant that the sole remaining Ju 88 presence in the Arctic was

Two of III./KG 30's Arctic aces, *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Werner Baumbach (left), wearing the Oak Leaves with Swords presented to him on 18 August 1942 (the first member of the bomber arm to receive the award), and Oberleutnant Helmut Weinreich (right), sporting the Knight's Cross won on 22 January 1943. Weinreich duly retrained as a *Wilde Sau* nightfighter pilot in the early autumn of 1943, being appointed *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 301 in October. He was killed on 18 November 1943 when his Fw 190, damaged in combat with an RAF bomber, exploded in the air as he approached to land at Frankfurt/Rhein-Main

being provided by a handful of meteorological and long-range reconnaissance machines.

That was not quite the end of the story. Over a year later, in the late autumn of 1944, two *Gruppen* of Ju 88s were transferred to the far north for the specific purpose of resuming the campaign against the Russian convoys. By this late stage of the war KG 26 had long been established as a fully-fledged torpedo-bomber *Geschwader*. After service in the Mediterranean and operations against the Allied landings in both Normandy and southern France, it had been withdrawn to Germany to rest and refit. It was from here that the two *Gruppen* were deployed up into northern Norway, I./KG 26 to Bardufoss and II./KG 26 to Banak. It was not long, however, before the latter unit was on the move again, being ordered down to Trondheim, in central Norway, to conduct operations over the North Sea.

Thus, when convoy RA 62 was sighted on 10 December 1944 leaving the Kola Inlet for the return run to Scotland, it fell to the Ju 88s of I./KG 26 to mount an attack. About 15 of the *Gruppe's* machines lifted off from Bardufoss on the morning of 12 December, only to become separated in bad weather. One by one the crews managed to locate the 28-ship convoy, but their single uncoordinated torpedo strikes held out little hope of success. None of the vessels was hit and two Ju 88s were lost, one going down on fire and the other being seen to ditch.

The Allied landings in North Africa in November 1942, code-named Operation *Torch*, resulted in the wholesale withdrawal of Luftwaffe bomber units from the Arctic and elsewhere. The only *Kampfgruppe* remaining in the far north following Operation *Torch* was I./KG 30, one of whose machines is seen here at a wintry Banak in December 1942

The following day's mission, flown by ten aircraft, was reportedly more successful. The convoy was found near Bear Island, a concerted attack was carried out and hits were claimed. In all, four attacks would be made during the five days that RA 62 was within range of the Bardufoss-based Ju 88s, the last by just five machines. Further claims resulted, but British records indicate that all 28 merchantmen reached port safely.

This was to be I./KG 26's last major action of the war. Early in February 1945 the *Gruppe* was disbanded, although most of the aircrew remained at Bardufoss for incorporation into the newly arrived II./KG 26. The latter's place at Trondheim – and its responsibility for North Sea operations – was in turn taken over by III./KG 26, which had flown up from Germany after completing re-equipment on Ju 188s.

February was also to witness the final confrontations between the Arctic convoys and the Luftwaffe's bomber forces in northern Norway. As always, events were set in motion by a reconnaissance sighting. This occurred on 6 February when a routine meteorological flight chanced upon convoy JW 64 three days out from Scotland. The following morning 25 machines of II./KG 26 prepared to take off from Bardufoss. However they were not after the merchantmen; on the express orders of Reichsmarschall Göring they were to target the aircraft carrier reported to be sailing in the middle of the convoy.

Ever since the HMS *Ark Royal* fiasco in the very first month of the war (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 17 - Ju 88 Kampfgeschwader on the Western*

Machines of 2./KG 30 – '4D+HK' in the foreground – over Banak in June 1943, just one month before I. *Gruppe's* transfer to the Mediterranean

Front), Göring had been obsessed by the fact that 'his' Luftwaffe had not managed to sink a single one of the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers. Now was probably its last chance. In fact, JW 64 was enjoying the protection of *two* escort carriers – HMS *Campania* and HMS *Nairana* – although neither vessel was in the body of the convoy, but part of the accompanying escort.

The Ju 88s of II. *Gruppe* may not have found their carrier, but the carriers' Wildcat fighters found them. Attacked from the air and faced by a curtain of defensive fire from the merchant ships and their naval close escorts, the torpedo-bombers failed to get through. Three aircraft were shot down and many more were damaged. The following day, 8 February, the Ju 188s of III./KG 26 flew in to Bardufoss from Trondheim-Vaernes. The two *Gruppen* were to mount a combined assault – attack the convoy *and* sink the carrier. Take-off was timed for 0830 hrs on 10 February. First, the 14 remaining serviceable Ju 88s of II. *Gruppe*, and then the 18 Ju 188s of III./KG 26 30 minutes later.

It was no easy task to coordinate an attack by two different types of aircraft approaching a target over 300 miles away from two different points of the compass. Perhaps not surprisingly, the assault on the convoy did not go according to plan, with the two waves attacking separately. This time five crews were lost and yet more machines suffered damage. However III./KG 26 did claim one merchantman sunk and both *Gruppen* also reported hits on a number of other vessels, including several warships. In reality, no ships were sunk, and certainly no aircraft carrier – a fact that was not lost on an aggrieved Göring, who immediately fired off a teletype addressed to both *Gruppenkommandeure*. 'I demand that you now finally sink an aircraft carrier as well'.

KG 26's torpedo-bombers had not managed to inflict any serious damage on JW 64. Their next operation, an attack flown on 20 February by 40 aircraft from both *Gruppen* against the returning RA 64, met with an equal lack of success. Moreover, six of their number were shot down by Fleet Air Arm Wildcats. Three days later – three days of gale-force winds and mountainous seas – 19 machines of KG 26, sent out to try to re-establish contact with the westbound convoy, stumbled instead upon a lone straggler. The outcome was inevitable and the hapless *Henry Bacon*, a 7177-ton US Liberty ship, has the dubious distinction of being the last Allied vessel to be sunk by Luftwaffe torpedo-bombers in World War 2.

Shortly after this 'success', the Ju 188s of III./KG 26 returned

For more than a year after the departure of I./KG 30, the only regular Ju 88 presence in the far north was that of *Luftflotte* 5's long-range reconnaissance and meteorological units. This Ju 88D reconnaissance machine attracts the curiosity of a horse-drawn mountain artillery troop plodding past the runway at Alakurtti, in northern Finland, in August 1943. Although coded 'G2+EH', which would indicate its being part of 1.(F)/124, the aircraft is wearing the 'midnight sun' badge of the *Aufklärungskette Lappland* beneath its cockpit

to Trondheim. March remained quiet, as did most of April, but towards the end of that month radio intercepts warned the Germans that another convoy was assembling in the Kola Inlet. Once again III. *Gruppe* was ordered up to Bardufoss, but the planned strike by II. and III./KG 26 against RA 66 – the penultimate homebound Allied convoy of the campaign – was called off at the very last moment. The Ju 188s promptly flew back to Trondheim, but within the week they were on the move again – this time not northwards, but southwards. On 8 May 1945 Germany surrendered, and both *Gruppen* were instructed to gather at Oslo-Gardemoen. Here, on the morning *after* the official capitulation, they were briefed for one final mission.

Another Ju 88D – this time of *Wekusta* 1/Ob.d.L, a meteorological *Staffel* – about to go down off the coast of Norway on 22 November 1943. Although this particular machine, 'D7+BH', had fallen foul of an RAF Mosquito, its final moments mirror a fate shared by many Arctic-based Ju 88 crews

For months past tremendous efforts had been made to rescue as many as possible of the untold thousands of Wehrmacht personnel and civilian refugees trapped in the east by the advancing Red Army. Most of those saved had been evacuated by sea from the many ports along the Baltic coast. Now, although having formally surrendered, German naval and Luftwaffe units were being granted one day's extension by the Western Allies to carry on with their humanitarian task.

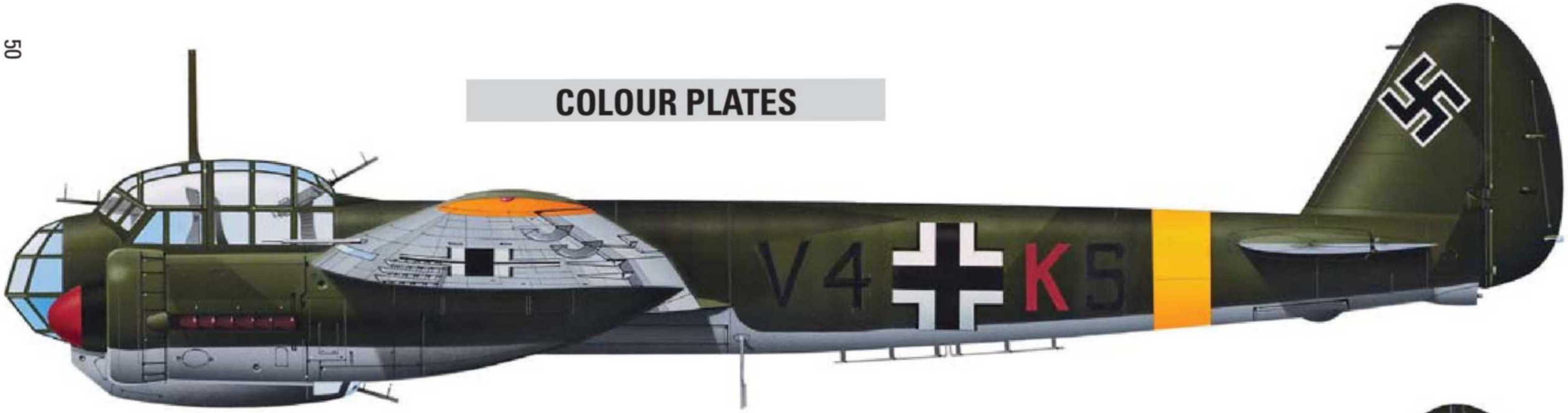
The largest body of German troops cut off behind the Russian front was on Latvia's Courland Peninsula, where more than 200,000 men of the 16. and 18. *Armeen* had been holding out since October 1944. And it was to Libau, on the peninsula's western coast – ironically, one of the ex-Soviet airfields targeted in the opening hours of *Barbarossa* – that the aircraft of KG 26's two *Gruppen* were now being sent with orders to bring out all the wounded they could carry. The date was 9 May 1945, and they had until 2000 hrs to complete their task, as this was the deadline set by the Allies for the unarmed torpedo-bombers to take-off from Libau for the flight back, either to Oslo or to Lübeck-Blankensee.

Some 40 machines were serviceable and able to take part in the mission. Each was permitted a crew of just two – a pilot and wireless-operator. They succeeded in rescuing 300+ men, returning with as many as eight wounded packed together in cockpits that were a squeeze for a normal crew of four.Upon landing, crewmen and wounded alike were taken into British captivity.

So ends the story of the totally separate war that was fought between the Arctic convoys and the Luftwaffe's two foremost anti-shipping *Kampfgeschwader*. It is time now to return to the Ju 88 bombers on the main sectors of the eastern front during that bitter first winter of 1941/42.

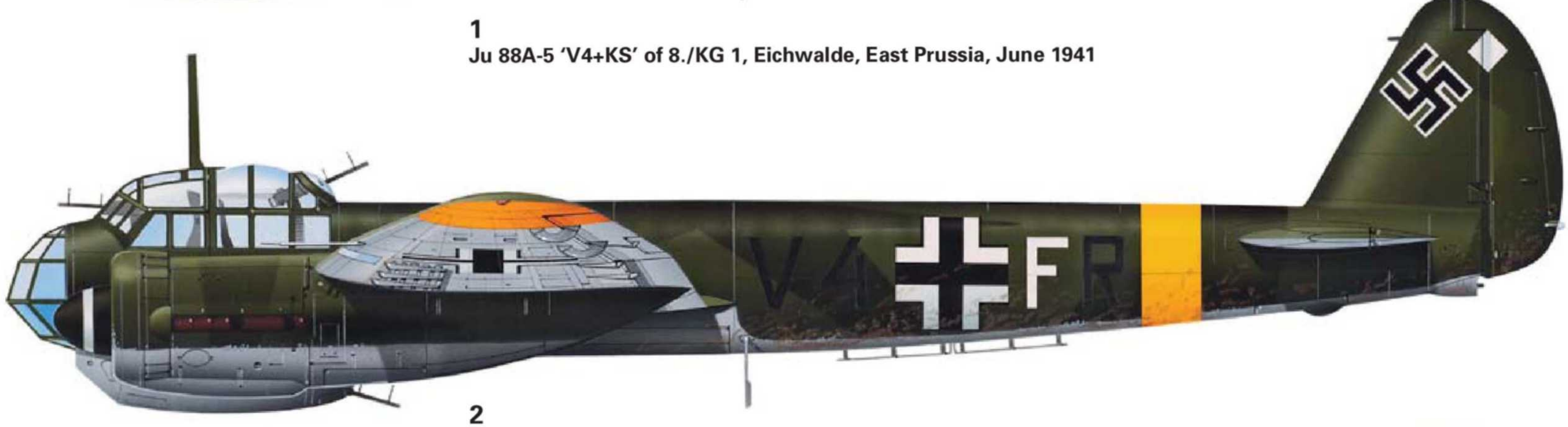
Ju 88s and Ju 188s of KG 26, the majority of them having very likely taken part in the recent Courland rescue operation, collected at Oslo-Gardemoen to await destruction by the victorious Allies in the summer of 1945

COLOUR PLATES



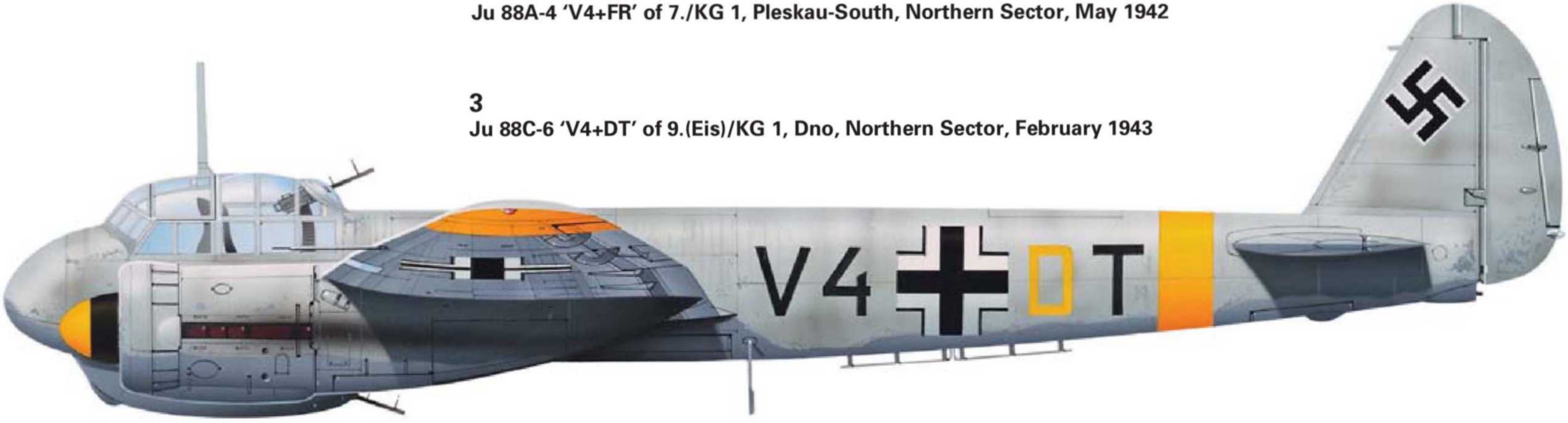
1

Ju 88A-5 'V4+KS' of 8./KG 1, Eichwalde, East Prussia, June 1941



2

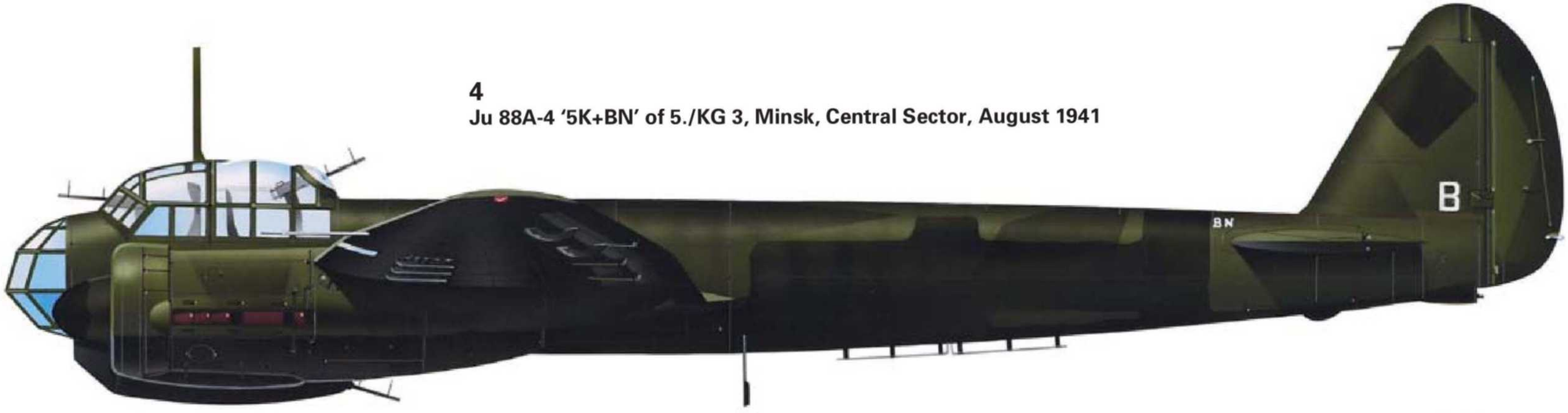
Ju 88A-4 'V4+FR' of 7./KG 1, Pleskau-South, Northern Sector, May 1942



3

Ju 88C-6 'V4+DT' of 9.(Eis)/KG 1, Dno, Northern Sector, February 1943

4
Ju 88A-4 '5K+BN' of 5./KG 3, Minsk, Central Sector, August 1941



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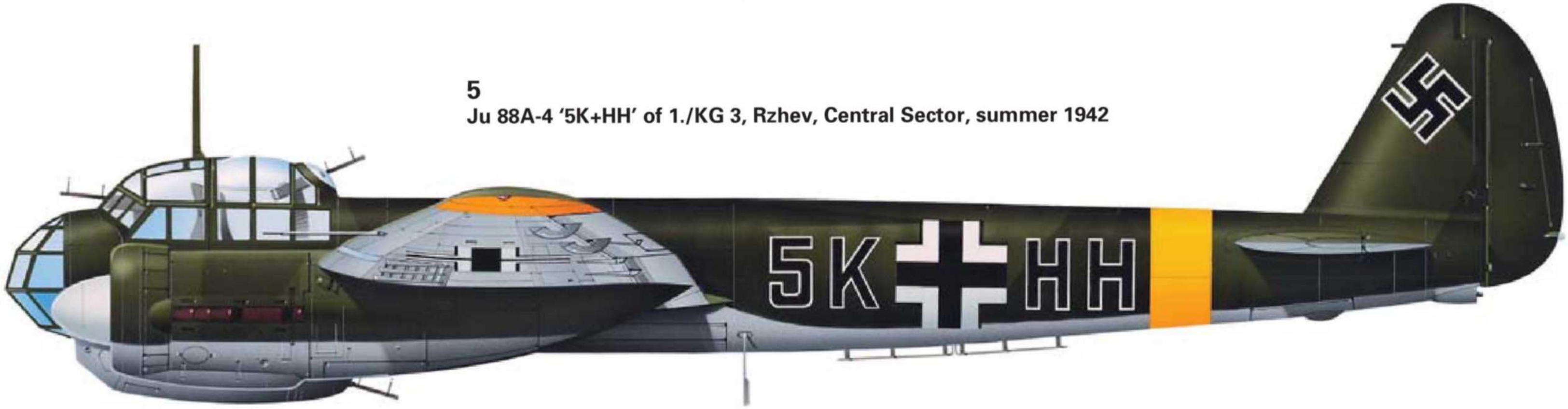
Ju 88A-4 '5K+HH' of 1./KG 3, Rzhev, Central Sector, summer 1942



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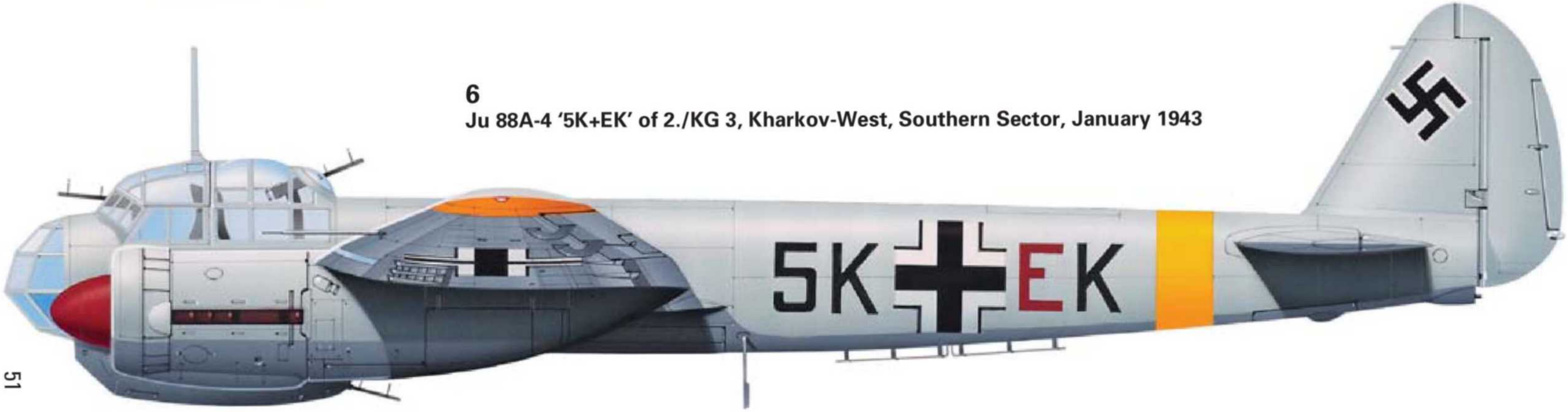
Ju 88A-4 '5K+EK' of 2./KG 3, Kharkov-West, Southern Sector, January 1943



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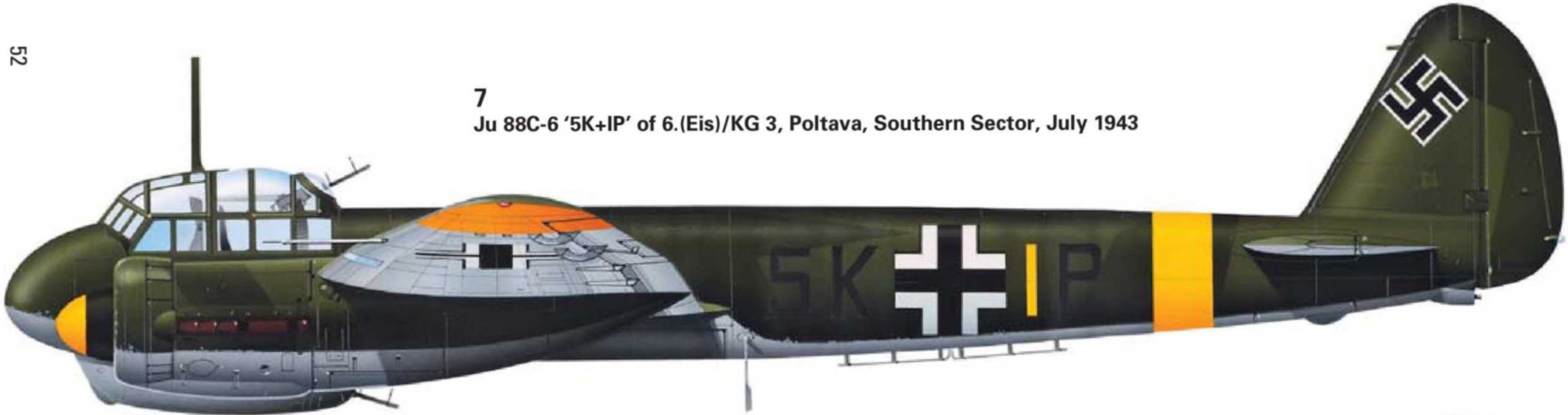
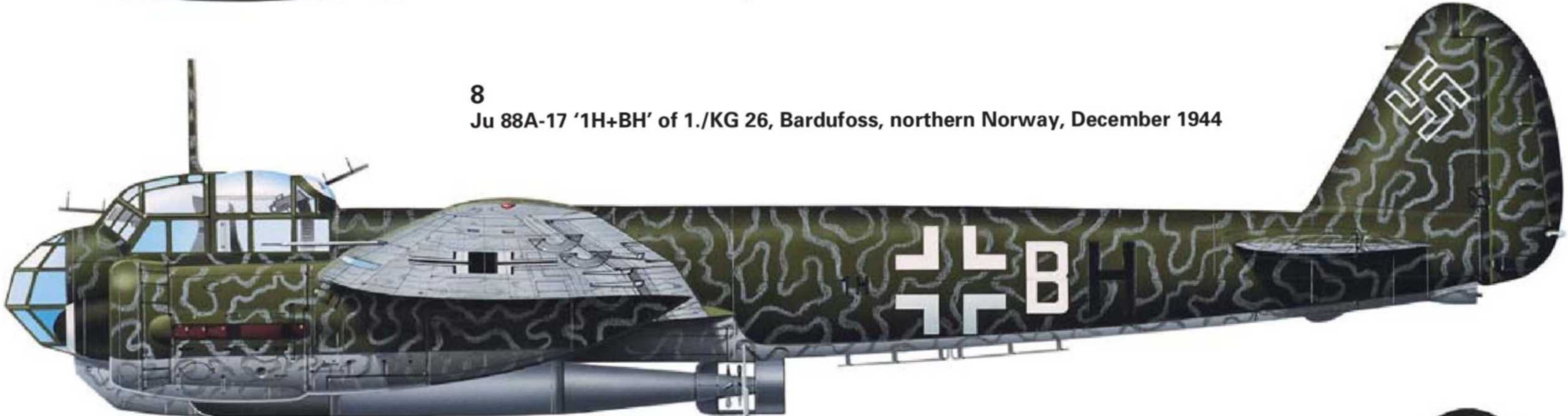
Ju 88C-6 '5K+IP' of 6.(Eis)/KG 3, Poltava, Southern Sector, July 1943



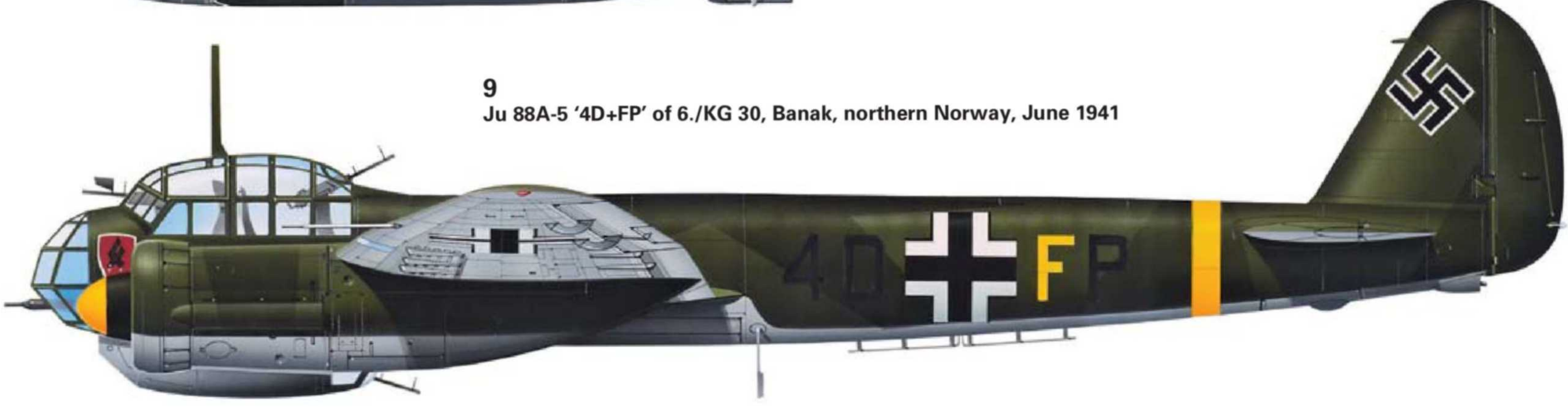
8

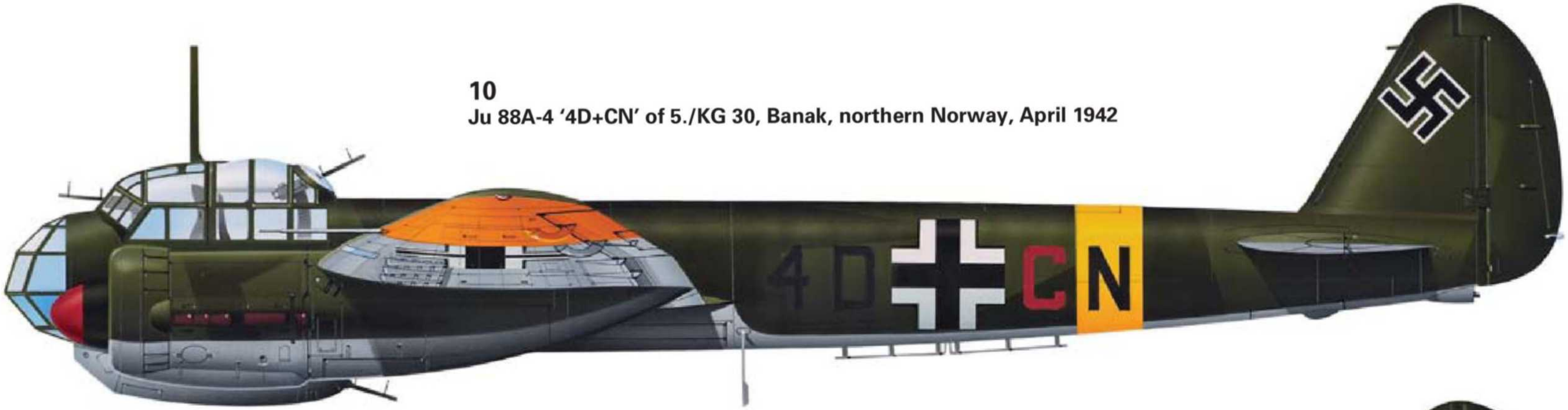
Ju 88A-17 '1H+BH' of 1./KG 26, Bardufoss, northern Norway, December 1944



9

Ju 88A-5 '4D+FP' of 6./KG 30, Banak, northern Norway, June 1941





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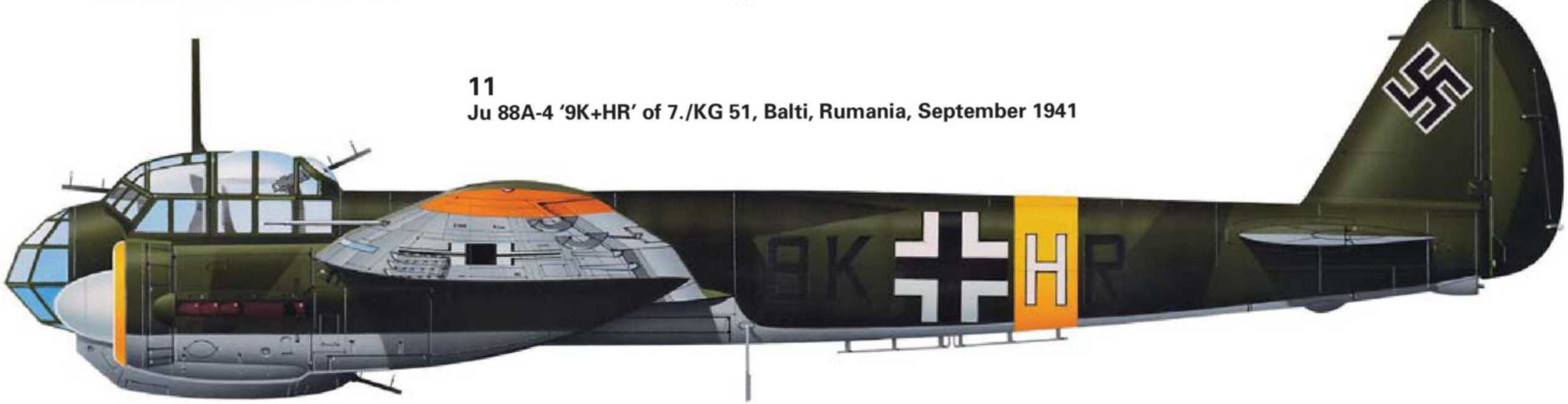
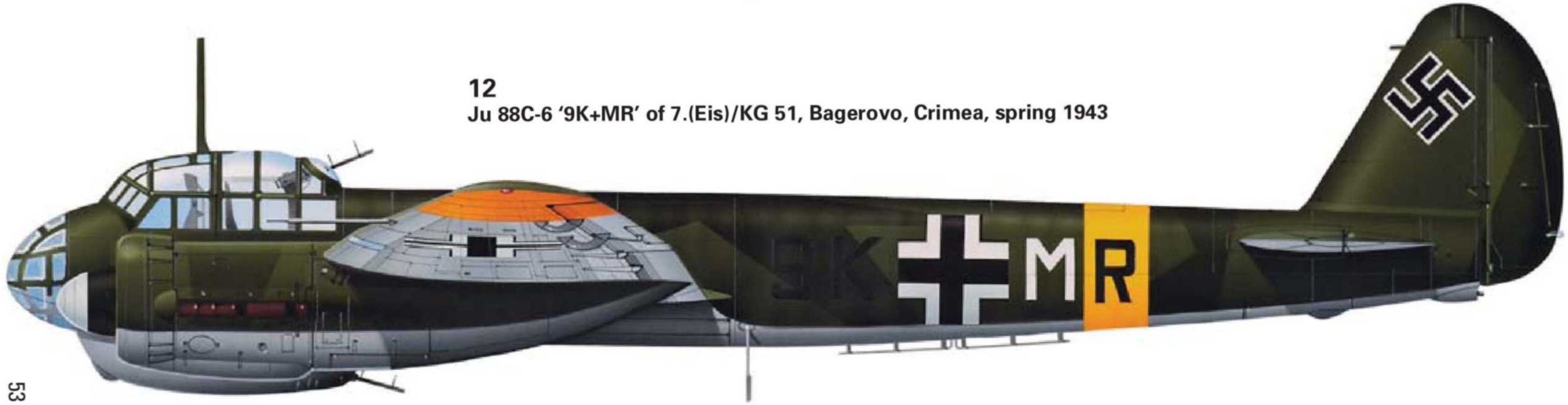
Ju 88A-4 '4D+CN' of 5./KG 30, Banak, northern Norway, April 1942



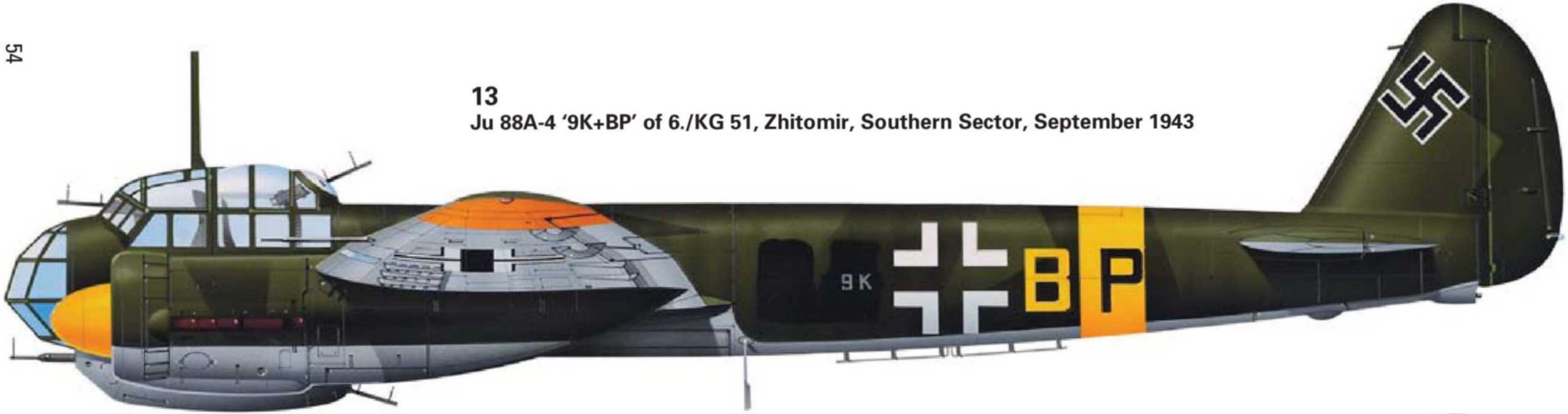
11

Ju 88A-4 '9K+HR' of 7./KG 51, Balti, Rumania, September 1941



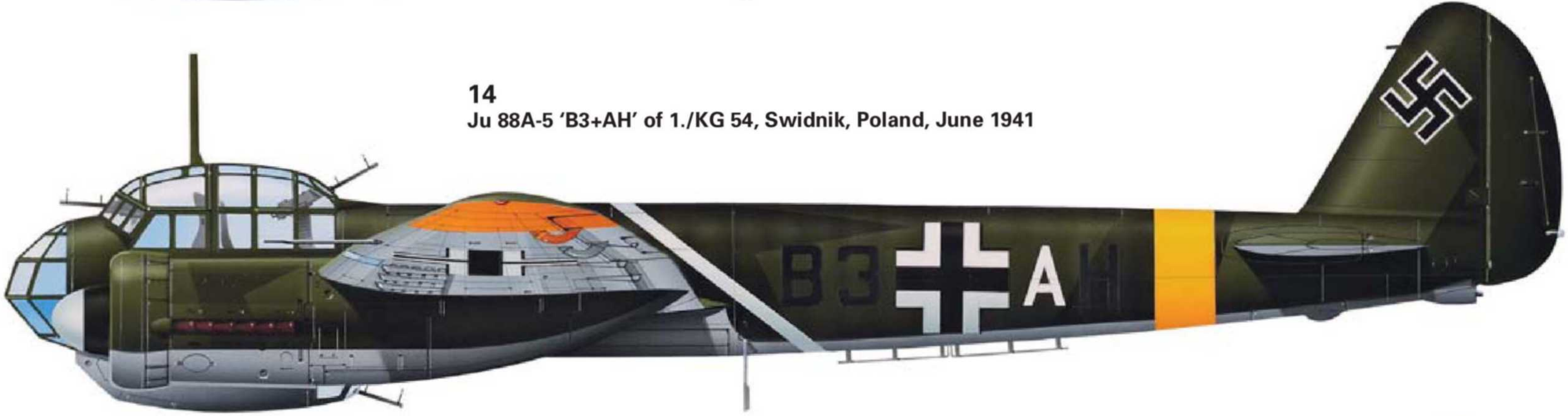
12

Ju 88C-6 '9K+MR' of 7.(Eis)/KG 51, Bagerovo, Crimea, spring 1943



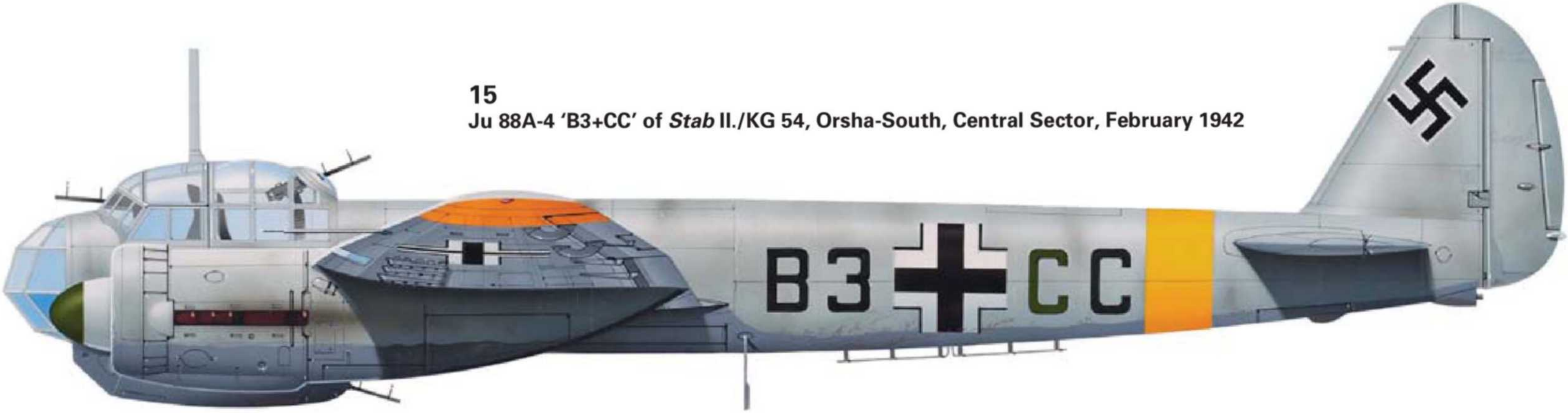
13

Ju 88A-4 '9K+BP' of 6./KG 51, Zhitomir, Southern Sector, September 1943



14

Ju 88A-5 'B3+AH' of 1./KG 54, Swidnik, Poland, June 1941

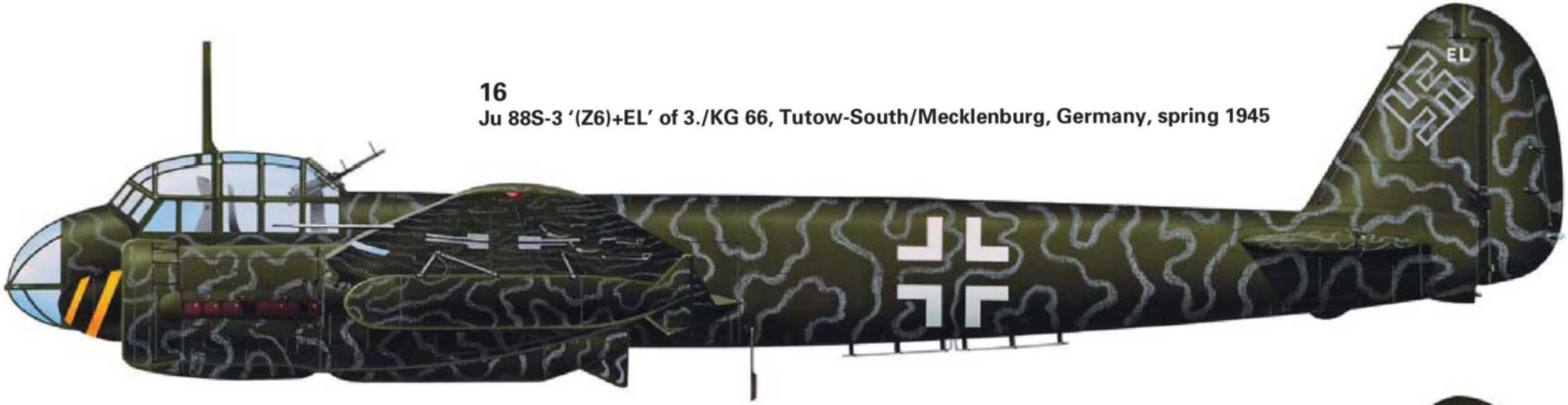


15

Ju 88A-4 'B3+CC' of *Stab* II./KG 54, Orsha-South, Central Sector, February 1942

16

Ju 88S-3 '(Z6)+EL' of 3./KG 66, Tutow-South/Mecklenburg, Germany, spring 1945



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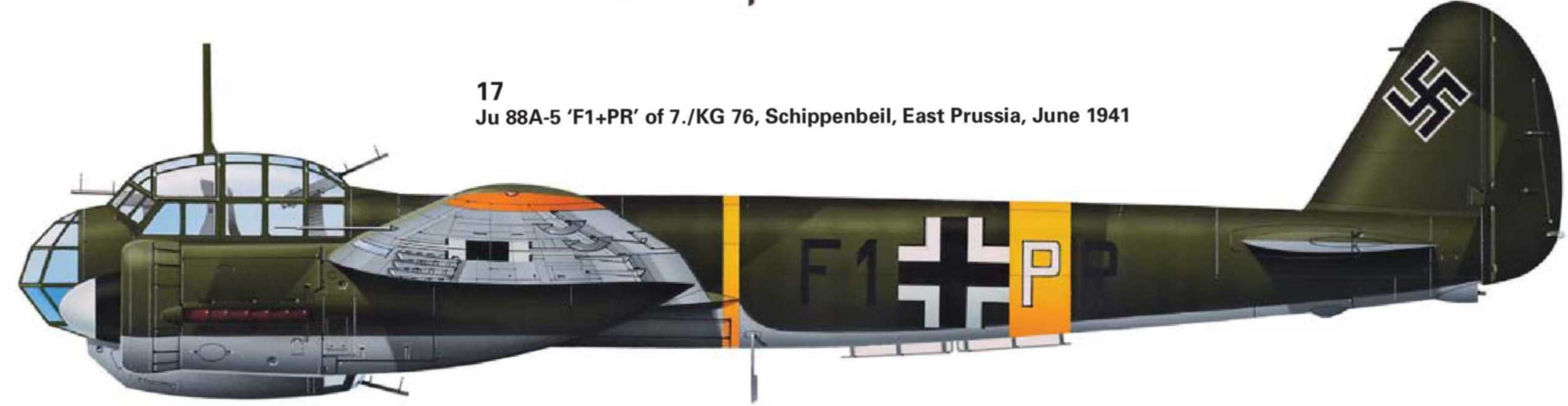
Ju 88A-5 'F1+PR' of 7./KG 76, Schippenbeil, East Prussia, June 1941



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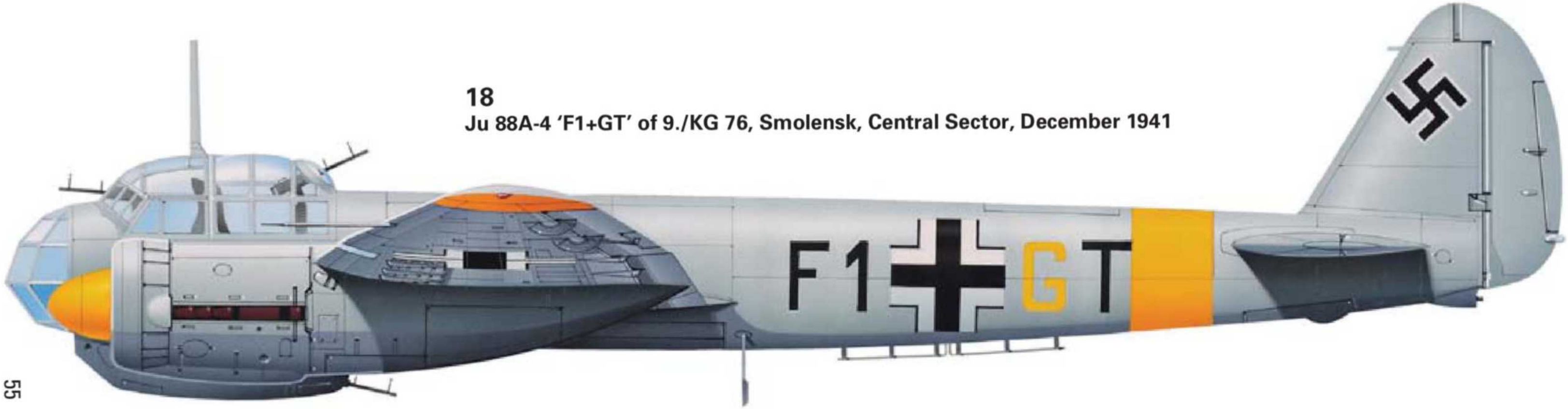
Ju 88A-4 'F1+GT' of 9./KG 76, Smolensk, Central Sector, December 1941



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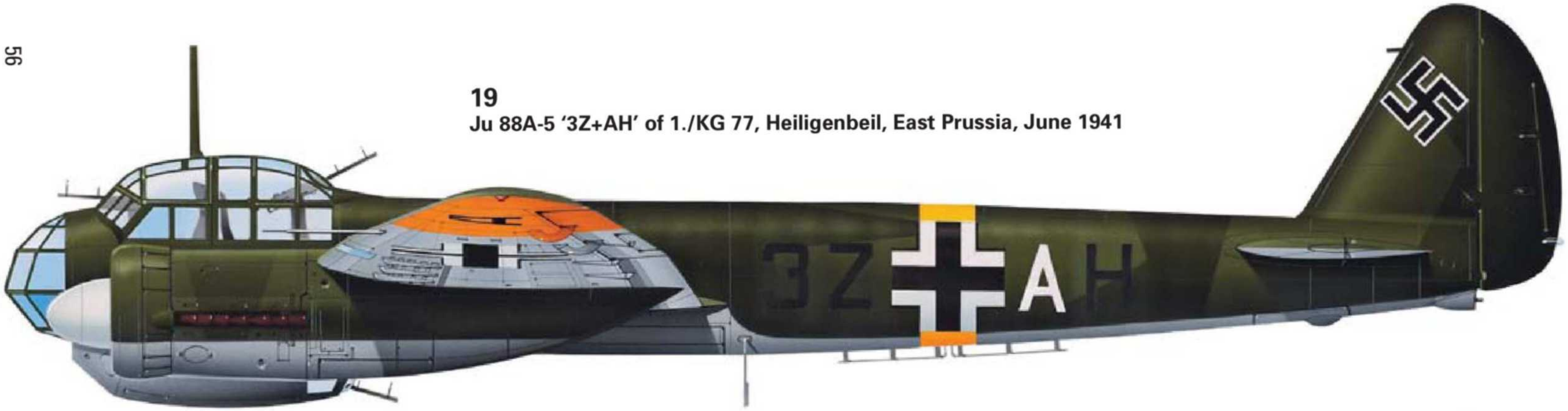
Ju 88A-5 '3Z+AH' of 1./KG 77, Heiligenbeil, East Prussia, June 1941



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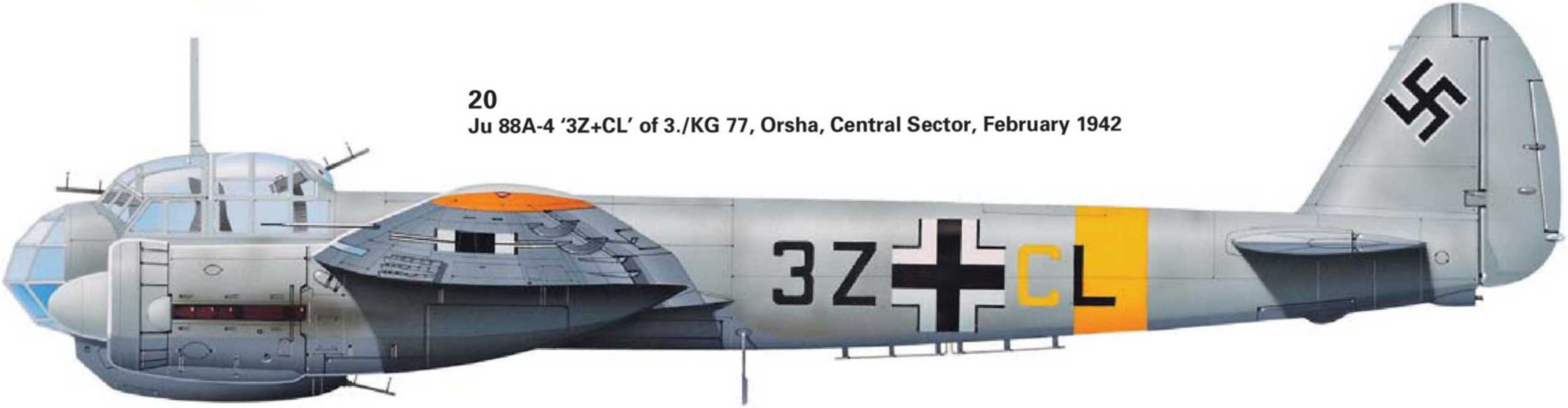
Ju 88A-4 '3Z+CL' of 3./KG 77, Orsha, Central Sector, February 1942



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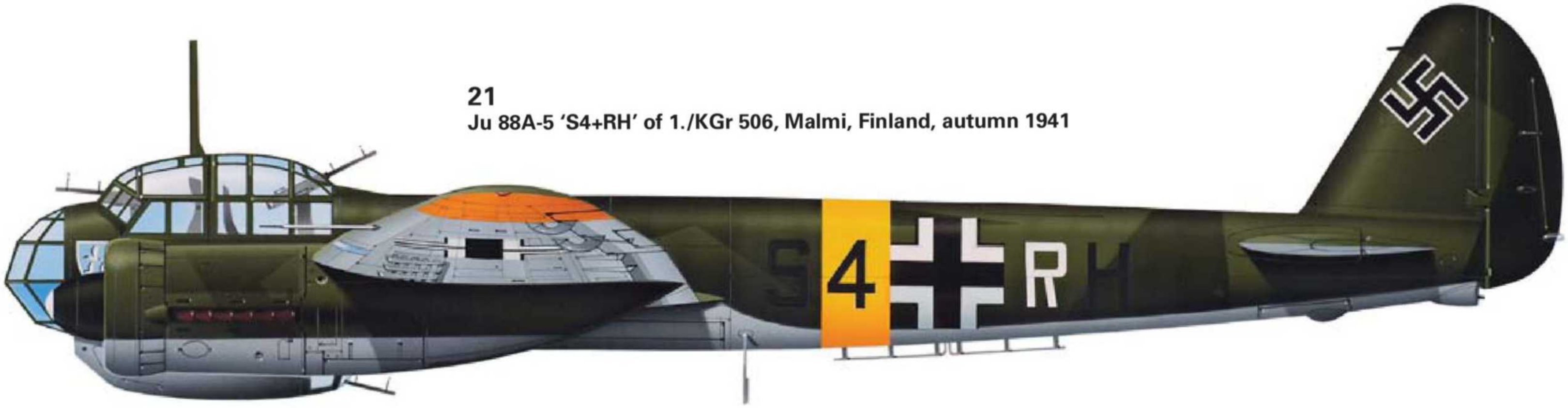
Ju 88A-5 'S4+RH' of 1./KGr 506, Malmi, Finland, autumn 1941



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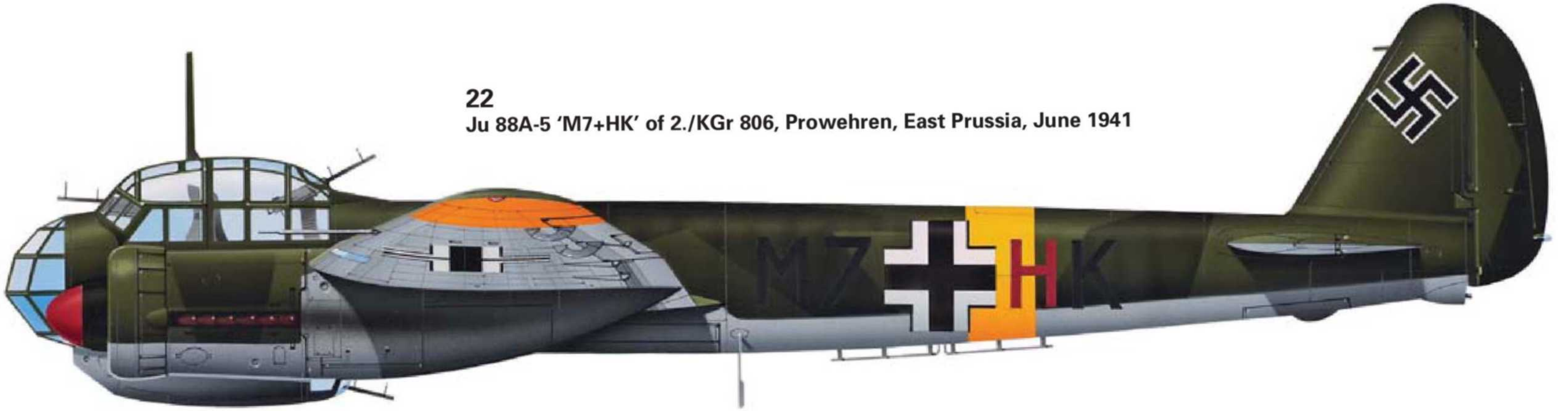
Ju 88A-5 'M7+HK' of 2./KGr 806, Prowehren, East Prussia, June 1941



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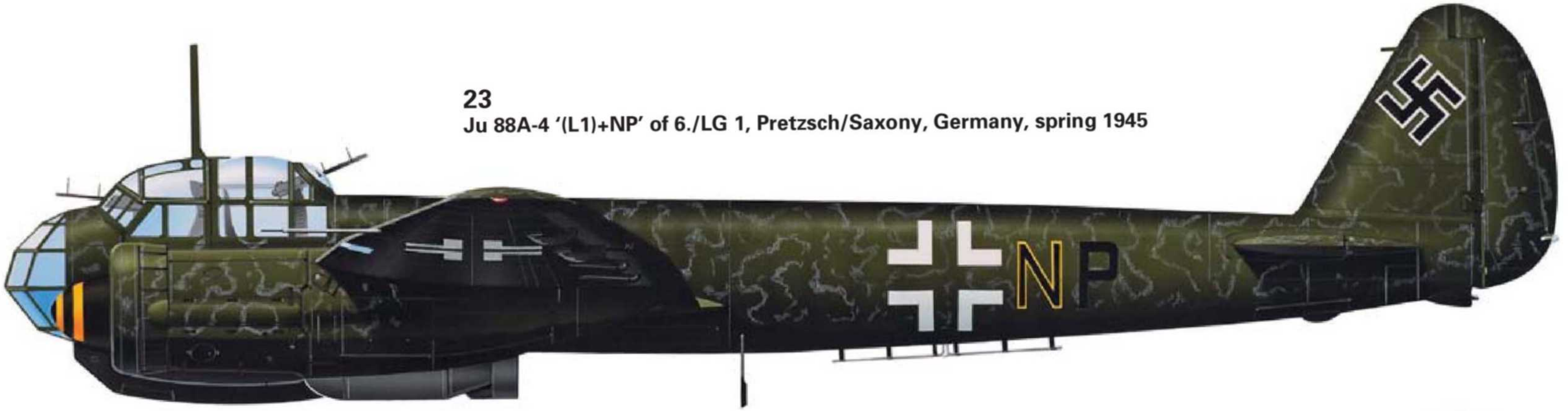
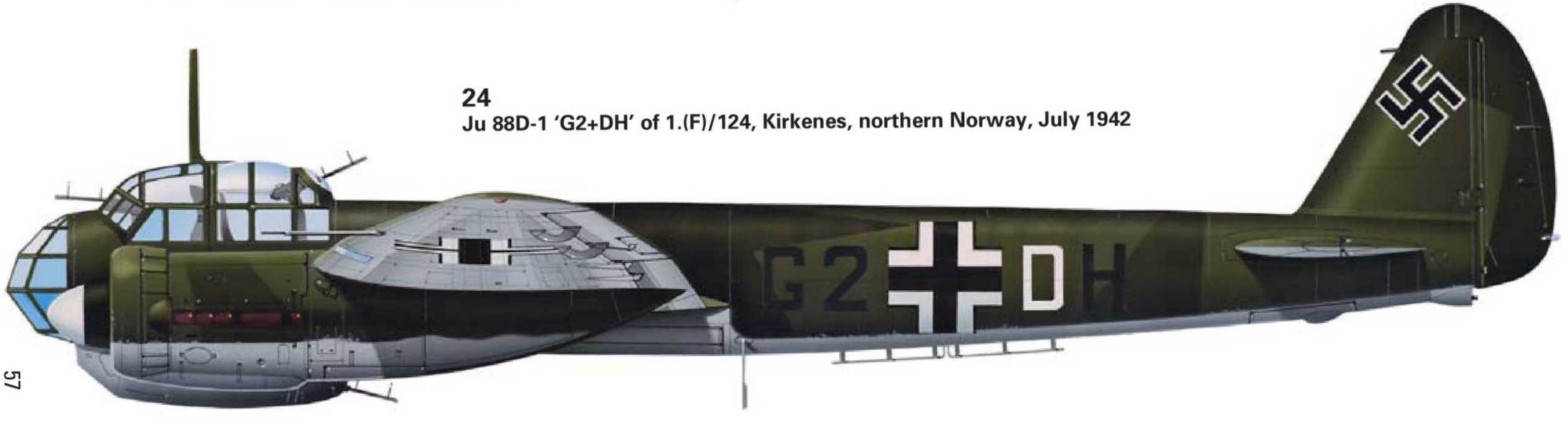
Ju 88A-4 '(L1)+NP' of 6./LG 1, Pretzsch/Saxony, Germany, spring 1945



24

Ju 88D-1 'G2+DH' of 1.(F)/124, Kirkenes, northern Norway, July 1942



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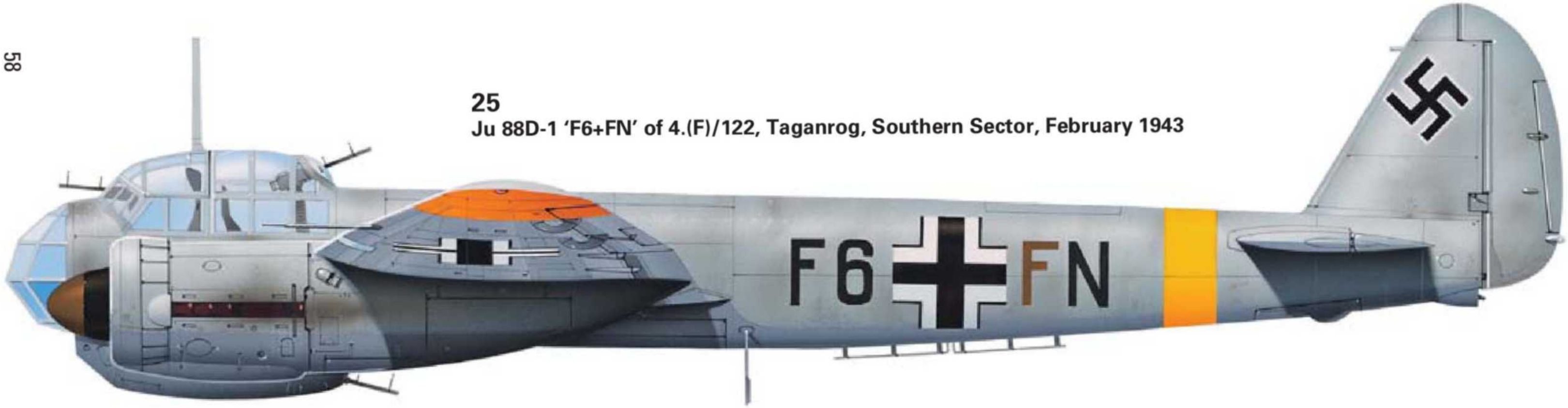
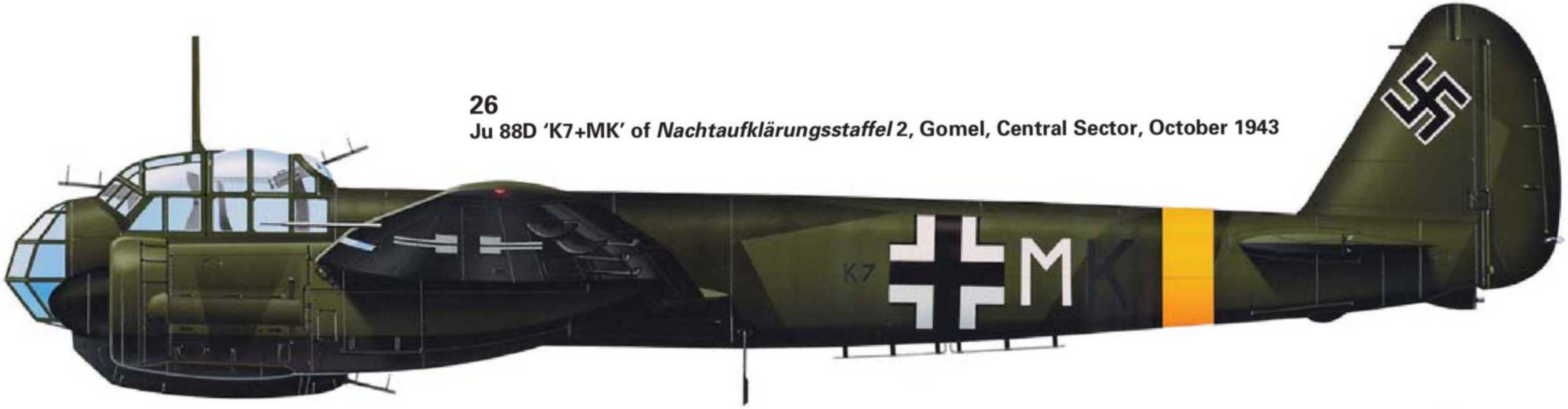
Ju 88D-1 'F6+FN' of 4.(F)/122, Taganrog, Southern Sector, February 1943



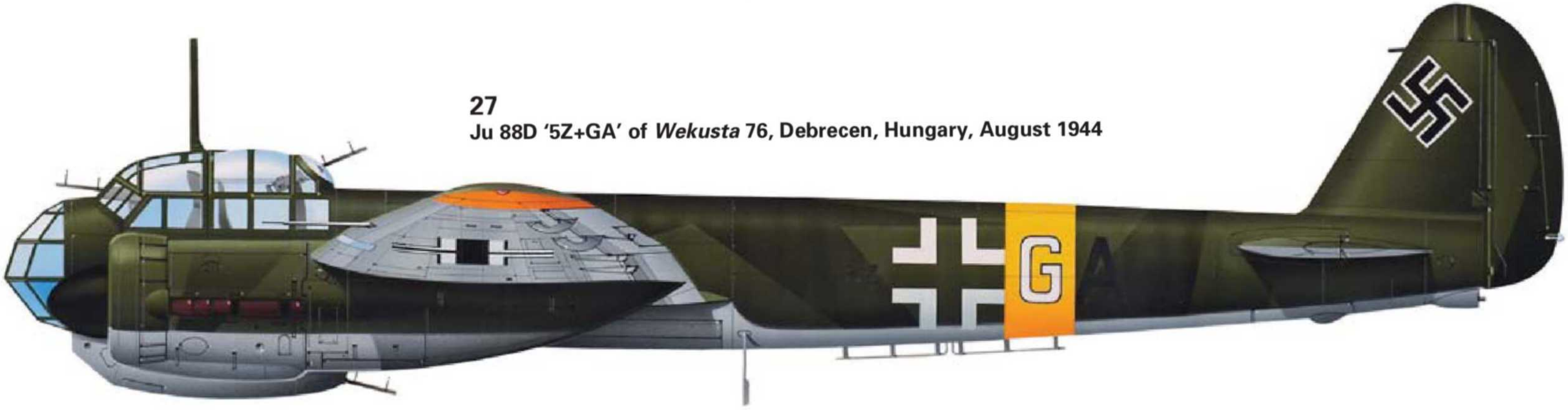
26

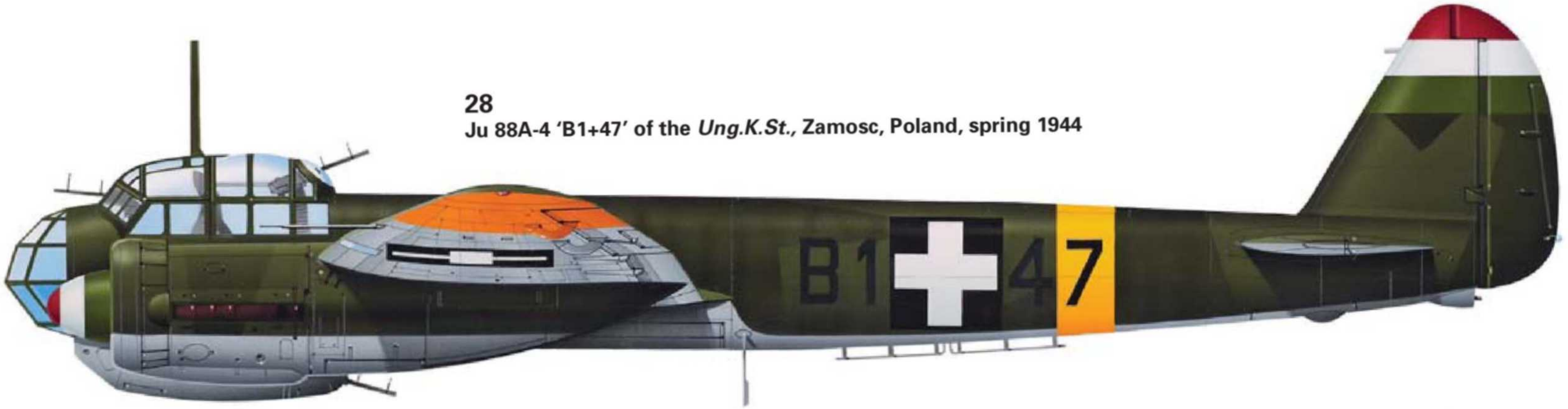
Ju 88D 'K7+MK' of *Nachtaufklärungsstaffel* 2, Gomel, Central Sector, October 1943



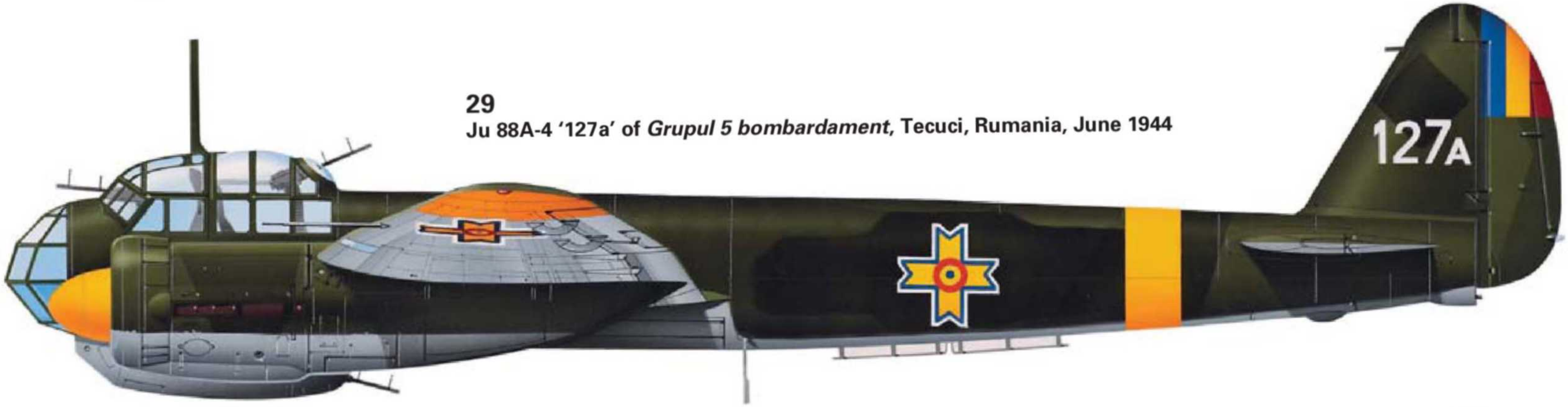
27

Ju 88D '5Z+GA' of *Wekusta* 76, Debrecen, Hungary, August 1944

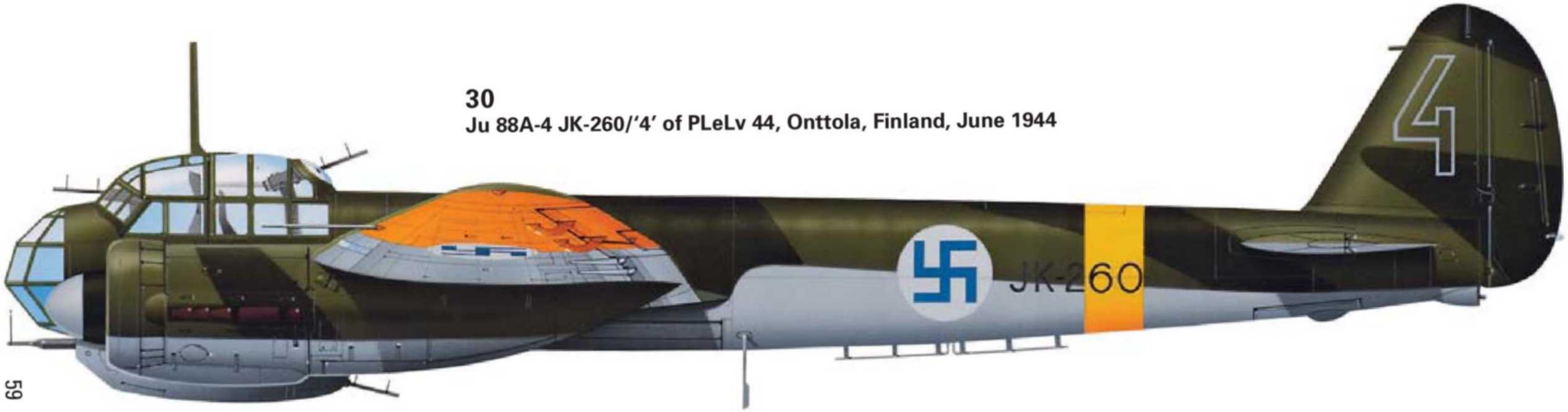




28
Ju 88A-4 'B1+47' of the *Ung.K.St.*, Zamosc, Poland, spring 1944

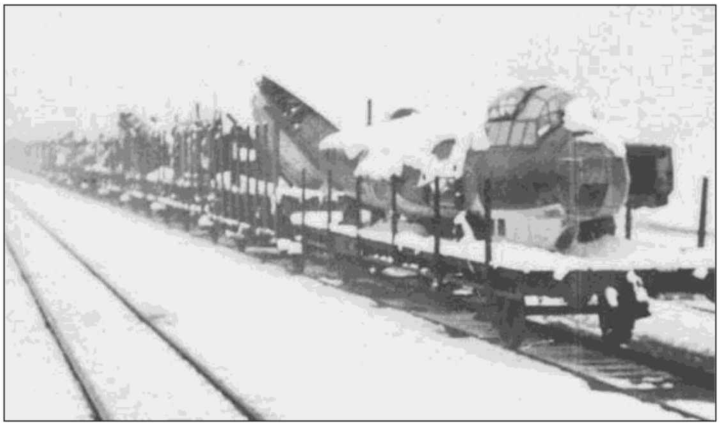


29
Ju 88A-4 '127a' of *Grupul 5 bombardament*, Tecuci, Rumania, June 1944



30
Ju 88A-4 JK-260/'4' of PLeLv 44, Onttola, Finland, June 1944

STALINGRAD AND AFTER



The first winter of the war in Russia took a heavy toll on men and machines alike. Here, a seemingly endless line of railway flatbed wagons has been loaded with damaged Ju 88s for transportation to the rear for major repair work

The Wehrmacht's failure to destroy the Red Army in the field before the onset of winter 1941 came as a devastating blow to Hitler. The German leader had gambled on a speedy and decisive *Blitzkrieg* in the east. Now that gamble had been lost and he was powerless to rectify the situation in the short term. His forces were ill prepared and ill equipped to fight a winter war. He acknowledged this in his Directive No 39 of 8 December 1941;

'The severe winter weather, which has arrived surprisingly early in the east, compels us to abandon immediately all major offensive operations and go over to the defensive.'

Less than four months later, however, he was drawing up plans for a renewed offensive in the east. Directive No 41 of 5 April 1942 stated;

'As soon as the weather and the state of the terrain allow, we must seize the initiative again. The armies of the central sector will stand fast, those in the north will capture Leningrad, while those on the southern flank will break through into the Caucasus.'

Among the original aims of *Barbarossa*, as first set out in December 1940, had been the occupation of Leningrad and the capture of Moscow 'which would represent a decisive political and economic success'. However the *Führer* now had more material prizes in mind. He wanted control of the industrial and mineral basins of the Dnieper and Don rivers, and the oil of the Caucasus. The main focus of operations on the Russian front in 1942 would therefore be in the south. But the renewal of the offensive called for by Hitler in April would not be launched until the summer. For the opening months of the year German forces on all three sectors – north, central and south – would have to conduct what, in modern parlance, might be termed damage limitation exercises. They had to attempt to repel all Soviet counter-offensives or, at the very least, restrict the enemy's territorial gains to a minimum.

THE NORTHERN SECTOR

The changeover from the offensive to the defensive affected German ground and air forces alike. In fact, the Luftwaffe's task was made all the more difficult by the start of the wholesale withdrawal of its units from the

Another *Kampfgruppe* whose intended transfer to the Mediterranean was deferred by the worsening situation on the eastern front was I./KG 77. Bundled up against the cold, a group of mechanics are in the process of changing the engine on this 1. *Staffel* machine

Russian front for service in other theatres. The first such transfers had already taken place before the end of 1941, and would ultimately result in a marked reduction in the number of Ju 88 bomber units in the east. This was particularly true of the northern sector where, of the eight Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* that had made up I. *Fliegerkorps* at the beginning of *Barbarossa*, only two remained by January 1942.

During the early winter months KG 77 had returned to the Reich for re-equipment prior to deployment to the Mediterranean, but only two of its *Gruppen* were subsequently to make the flight south. Events on the eastern front led to I./KG 77 being moved up to Heiligenbeil, in East Prussia, for 'winterisation' before then being returned to Russia, albeit not to the northern sector. I. *Fliegerkorps* also lost the services of Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst Bormann's KG 76. He took two of his *Gruppen* to the central sector, leaving I./KG 76 to retire to the Reich for rest and refit. This meant that by early 1942, the sole Ju 88 bomber presence on the northern sector was being provided by II. and III./KG 1, and even they would be temporarily withdrawn from the area on deployment to both the central and southern sectors during the year.

In the winter of 1941/42, operations on the northern front were still dominated by the siege of Leningrad. The first week of the new year saw the two *Gruppen* of KG 1 (together with the He 111s of KG 4) attacking the now famous 'ice road', the perilous route across the frozen surface of Lake Ladoga used by Soviet truck convoys to ferry supplies into the beleaguered city. Then, in mid-January, a major Russian counter-offensive between Lakes Ladoga and Ilmen drove German forces back across the River Volkhov. The two *Gruppen* of KG 1 were immediately called upon for support. They bombed the advancing Red Army units and attacked the rail supply lines to the enemy's rear.

Soon the whole northern sector was ablaze. The lack of Luftwaffe numbers in the area was quickly laid bare as KG 1's Junkers were forced into a series of 'fire brigade' actions, rushing from one area of danger to the next in their attempts to stem the Soviet flood tide. By late January the Red Army had broken through the front south of Lake Ilmen, cutting off two large bodies of German troops at Demyansk and Cholm. The battle for these two pockets would rage for very nearly three months before ground contact was re-established and the surrounded units were at last reached by reinforcements.

Could this aircraft about to be bombed up also belong to I./KG 77? Although the unit badge has been thoroughly obliterated, the size and position of the defaced area closely approximates the emblem still being worn by the machine above. The snow-covered background offers no clues, but note that both aircraft have a similar additional machine gun installed in the lower nose glazing

Some *Gruppen* spending winter on former Soviet airfields enjoyed the luxury of hangar space for essential maintenance and repairs. Although such structures kept the worst of the elements at bay, the temperatures within were still sub-zero – note the layers of snow clinging to this aircraft's canopy and engine nacelle

The struggle overhead was no less ferocious as Luftwaffe and Red Air Force machines fought for mastery of the skies above the twin battlefields. In one particularly confused melee over the Cholm perimeter on 28 February, 4./KG 1 lost its *Staffelkapitän.* Oberleutnant Johannes Brandenburg, who had won the Knight's Cross while serving with KG 30 in the west, was killed when his aircraft exploded in mid-air after being struck by a bomb from another machine diving above him.

By mid-March KG 1's crews were flying as many as six sorties a day in support of the ground troops in and around the Demyansk pocket. Operations of such intensity inevitably resulted in further casualties. Two *Kapitäne* of 5. *Staffel* were reported missing in the space of just three days – Oberleutnant Hans Sumpf on 26 March and Hauptmann Peter Runkel on the 29th – both failing to return from missions to the northeast of Demyansk. Coincidentally, the latter date also saw II. *Gruppe* fly its 4000th operation since the start of the war (with III./KG 1 clocking up its 5000th just 48 hours later).

In early April the two *Gruppen* enjoyed – if 'enjoyed' be the right word – a brief respite from the fighting for the two pockets when they participated in a large-scale attack on major units of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. These included the elderly battleship *Oktyabrskaya Revolutsiya* and the heavy cruiser *Maksim Gorky*, both of which were still locked fast in the ice of Leningrad's River Neva. Running the gauntlet of the city's legendary flak defences, the bombers claimed numerous near misses, causing minor damage to the two capital ships and several other vessels.

The spring thaw may not yet have reached Leningrad, but it was already turning KG 1's base at Dno into 'one huge lake'. On 11 and 12 April the two *Gruppen* therefore moved to Pleskau-South in order to continue their operations over the two pockets. A corridor through to the 95,000 men trapped at Demyansk was finally opened on 21 April. It was on this day that III./KG 1 was ordered back to the Reich for refit, leaving just II. *Gruppe* to fly the ground support missions that would help free the much smaller Cholm pocket on 5 May. Major Hans Keppler's III./KG 1 returned to Pleskau-South on 22 May, and three days later it was the turn of II. *Gruppe* to head for Germany and four weeks rest and re-equipment.

By this time Lake Ladoga's 'ice road' to Leningrad had melted away and the lake's flotilla of small merchant vessels would soon be sailing again. One of III./KG 1's early missions after its arrival back from Insterburg, in East Prussia, was a raid flown on 28 May against the ships' ports of departure on the far shore of Lake Ladoga. This attempt to disrupt the city's surface lifeline cost 8. *Staffel* one of its new Ju 88A-4s. On 1 June the *Gruppe* made the short hop from Pleskau-South to Raskopolye, a small landing ground nearby, before returning to a now thoroughly dried-out Dno nine days later. For much of the rest of the month crews would be primarily engaged in attacking the surviving units of the Red Army force that had breached the Volkhov defences back in January and were now surrounded and trapped at Lyuban, 55 miles south-southeast of Leningrad.

On 22 June II./KG 1 flew back in from Germany to rejoin III. *Gruppe* at Dno. During the first few days of July the two units carried out several anti-shipping sorties over the Gulf of Finland. Then, on 7 July, a dangerous Soviet armoured thrust on the central sector resulted in

III./KG 1 being rushed down to Bryansk, about 250 miles southwest of Moscow. It was followed by II. *Gruppe* 72 hours later. KG 1's bombing attacks on the enemy's armoured spearheads and rear area lines of supply clearly helped to contain the threat, for on 27 July both *Gruppen* were sent back to Dno.

From here they turned their attention to Leningrad again, taking part in the raid of 2 August that was reportedly the heaviest experienced by the city for almost a year. The defending fighters' claims for 27 of the attackers shot down were wildly optimistic. KG 1's actual casualties were just three crewmen wounded by machine-gun fire, but the *Geschwader* was to suffer far more grievous losses before the month was out.

Within hours of the Leningrad raid another major Soviet counter-attack on the central sector saw the two *Gruppen* quickly transferred down to the danger area. Operating initially out of Shatalovka-East against troop movements to the southeast of Rzhev, they were then deployed to Bryansk again on 9 August, where they were to perform more of the 'fire brigade' duties that they had undertaken along this selfsame stretch of front only weeks before. This time it was to cost them dear.

KG 1's long-serving *Geschwaderkommodore*, Generalmajor Karl Angerstein, had only recently relinquished command of the unit upon being appointed GOC of the Luftwaffe's bomber and reconnaissance schools. His replacement, Oberstleutnant Peter Schemmel, was to last less than a month. The new *Kommodore* and his crew were lost when their 'V4+AA' was shot down by Soviet fighters northeast of Rzhev on 14 August. The *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./KG 1, Major Herbert Lorch, was immediately named acting-*Kommodore* in his stead, but his tenure of office proved to be even shorter, for he too fell victim to enemy fighters just five days later.

On 27 August the two *Gruppen* returned north to Dno. During its brief deployment to the central sector KG 1 had lost some half-dozen aircraft and crews (including the two *Geschwaderkommodores*). In the same period it had gained three new Knight's Cross winners. The first of these was Oberleutnant Otto von Ballasko, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9./KG 1, who was decorated on 13 August. The second award, announced exactly one week later, was posthumous. It honoured Oberleutnant Hans Sumpf, one of the two *Kapitäne* of 5. *Staffel* lost over Demyansk back in March. The third recipient was the *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*, Major Hans Keppler. He received his Knight's Cross on 21 August, and ten days after that was appointed *Geschwaderkommodore*, by which time KG 1 was back on the northern sector.

Fate had one last trick to play. Just *three* days after assuming command of the *Geschwader*, Major Keppler and his crew were killed when their Ju 88 was involved in a mid-air collision with a Bf 109 of III./JG 54 south of Lake Ladoga.

With three *Kommodores* having been lost in fewer than as many weeks, it would be 18 September before Hans Keppler's successor was announced. Major Heinrich Lau was doubly fortunate. Not only did he survive his six months at the head of KG 1, he was also the first *Kommodore* in more than two-and-a-half years to command a full *Geschwader* complement of three *Gruppen*, for on 8 September II. and III./KG 1 had been joined at Dno by a brand new I./KG 1.

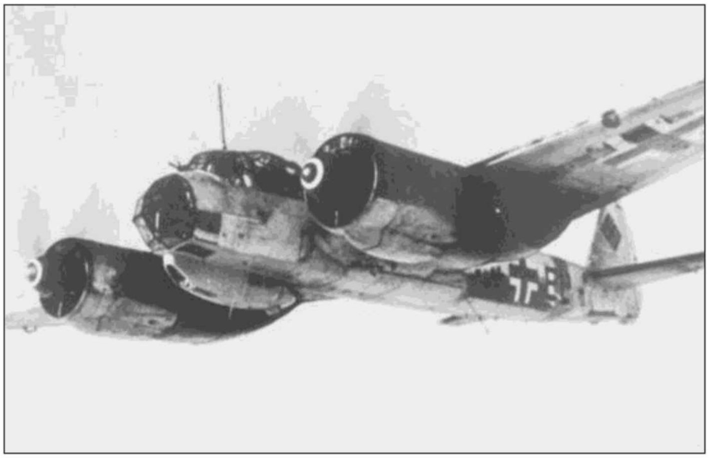
The last *Gruppe* to bear this number had parted ways with the *Geschwader* upon being redesignated III./KG 40 back in March 1940. The new *Gruppe* was created in a likewise manner when III./KG 26, then based at Lübeck-Blankensee and flying He 111s, had been redesignated to become I./KG 1 early in June 1942. The following three months had been spent re-equipping with the Ju 88 and training, both in Germany and France, before the unit was finally transferred to the eastern front.

I./KG 1's arrival at an already overcrowded Dno led to II. *Gruppe's* moving up to Siverskaya, closer to Leningrad, a week later. From here II./KG 1 continued to fly missions over the Lake Ladoga area, while the two Dno-based *Gruppen* spent the latter half of September operating against enemy forces exerting pressure on the Demyansk sector of the front south of Lake Ilmen. Then, early in October, the *Geschwader* was put on standby for another move. This was to take it not just across the Army Group boundary into the central sector, but much further south. By 7 October Major Lau's three *Gruppen* found themselves deployed on the two fields at Morosovskaya, just 125 miles away from Stalingrad.

The crews were not impressed with their new surroundings, claiming that the accommodation in Morosovskaya's earthen bunkers was 'primitive in the extreme', but they soon had other things to worry about. On 10 October KG 1's Ju 88s took part in a major raid on the oil refinery at Grozny, deep in the Caucasus, from which a machine of 1. *Staffel* failed to return. They would lose at least eight more aircraft during their four weeks on the Stalingrad front, where their main targets were pockets of resistance within the ruins of the city itself, as well as Soviet artillery positions and lines of supply on the east bank of the Volga and beyond.

Early in November III./KG 1 was instructed to return to the Reich for refit. At the same time the rest of the *Geschwader* was transferred up to Orsha-South on the central sector. Intelligence had revealed that the Red Army was about to launch another large-scale counter-offensive in this area and, despite the sudden onset of winter in the region, KG 1's two *Gruppen* were tasked with disrupting the build-up of supplies. An attack on two important marshalling yards to the enemy's rear on 10 November was particularly successful, crippling the movement of all traffic for several days. After this the Ju 88s concentrated on the Soviet infantry and armoured formations' assembly points around Rzhev and Bjely.

In spite of all their efforts, a powerful force of enemy tanks managed to smash through the German front southeast of Rzhev on 28 November. Although the weather was appalling, the Junkers were ordered into the air. It was to be one of the blackest days in the *Geschwader's* history, as although the crews involved somehow succeeded in sealing off the breach, it cost them 11 aircraft lost and many more damaged. In ever more atrocious conditions – snowstorms, freezing fog and low-lying cloud – I. and II./KG 1 continued to fly in



'V4+EL', a winter-camouflaged Ju 88A-4 of 3./KG 1, returns from a mission to the Rzhev area in November 1942

support of the hard-pressed ground forces. On 8 December II. *Gruppe* lost its *Kommandeur* when the Ju 88 of Hauptmann Heinz Laube iced up and crashed. He and his crew would be the final casualties of the year. Two weeks later the still leaderless II./KG 1 returned home to join III. *Gruppe* at Königsberg-Neuhausen.

Meanwhile I./KG 1 had been transferred down to the southern sector again, staging from Orsha, via Bryansk and Kharkov, to Urasov, where it was placed under the control of *Luftwaffenkommando Don* (the renamed I. *Fliegerkorps* – see below). It would spend the closing days of 1942 in action against a triumphant Red Army that was surging westwards past an already encircled and doomed Stalingrad.

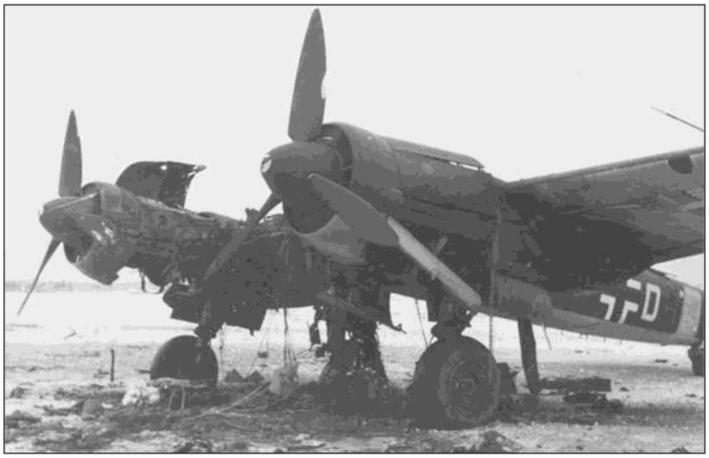
The instructions contained in the *Führer's* Directive of 5 April 1942 that the forces on the northern sector 'will capture Leningrad' had clearly not been fulfilled. As far as Ju 88 numbers were concerned, the sector that had had two *Kampfgruppen* within its area of command at the beginning of 1942 ended the year with none. So how had the forces on the central sector fared during the same period – had they been able to follow Hitler's orders to 'stand fast' in 1942?

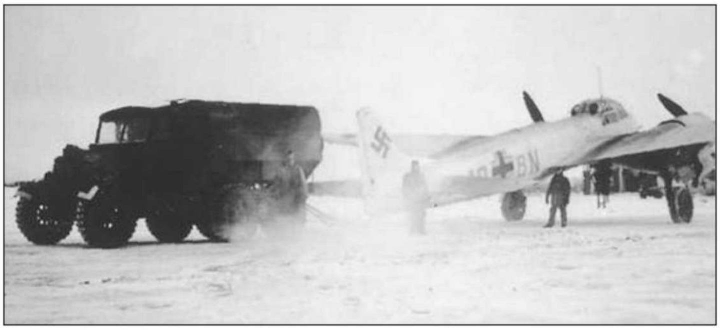
HOLDING THE CENTRE

In terms of aerial strength, the central sector had been the hardest hit by the withdrawal of units to other theatres. Towards the end of 1941 the whole of *Luftflotte* 2's staff organisation, together with one of its two subordinate *Fliegerkorps*, had been transferred *en bloc* to the Mediterranean. This left just one *Korps* – General Wolfram *Freiherr* von Richthofen's close-support VIII. *Fliegerkorps* – solely responsible for the approximately 400 miles of front that made up the central sector.

But the sector's two 'resident' Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen*, although hitherto part of II. *Fliegerkorps*, had not been included in the mass exodus to the Mediterranean. They had been retained on the Moscow front, where they would be joined by a large number of other *Kampfgruppen*. Together, these would provide von Richthofen with a powerful longer-range strike force. By early 1942 he controlled no fewer than 13 such *Kampfgruppen*, eight of which were equipped with Ju 88s.

These were all organised into one special battle group, or aerial task force, the so-called *Gefechtsverband Bormann*. As its name indicates, this force was commanded by Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst Bormann, the *Geschwaderkommodore* of KG 76, who had brought two of his *Gruppen* down from the northern sector. Another incomer from the north, via a brief period of 'winterisation' in the Reich, was I./KG 77. Like the latter, II./KG 54 had also initially been scheduled for transfer to the Mediterranean, only then to be 'winterised' and returned to the Russian front. Coming from further afield, II./KG 30 had previously operated in the Arctic and – finally – I. and II./KG 3 were joined


1./KG 77's '3Z+DH' looking decidedly the worse for wear – victim of a Soviet air raid, or an accident while bombing up? Oddly, the port mainwheel tyre seems to have escaped the mayhem



Coming down from the Arctic, midwinter on the central sector must have felt positively balmy to the crews of II./KG 30. Note the captured British Army Scammell heavy artillery tractor being employed to tow 5. *Staffel's* white-camouflaged '4D+BN'

by III. *Gruppe*, which had recently completed conversion from the Dornier Do 17 on to Ju 88s.

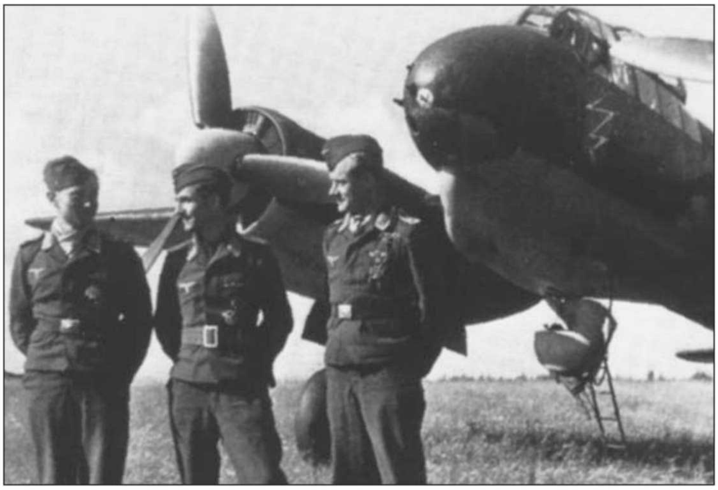
During the early weeks of 1942, based on the airfields of the large Orsha complex and others in the surrounding areas close to the main Minsk-Moscow highway, the *Gefechtsverband's* units were engaged primarily in bombing the salients punched into the German frontlines by the Red Army's winter counter-offensives. Given the Soviet troops' unfailing habit of letting loose with every weapon that they could bring to bear against any enemy aircraft daring to fly overhead, it could be a risky business. KG 76 reportedly lost six machines to ground fire during a mission close to the hotly contested town of Rzhev on 8 January.

Nor were the Russians the only enemy that had to be faced. The appalling conditions and freezing temperatures were the cause of numerous fatal accidents. Three crew members of another KG 76 machine were killed when their aircraft skidded off the icy runway upon landing back at Orsha after a mission and smashed head-on into the solid wall of snow banked up high alongside.

Other targets during January included the Soviets' lines of supply. Major Sigmund-Ulrich *Freiherr* von Gravenreuth's II./KG 30 scored a spectacular success during one attack on a marshalling yard on the Tula-Orel railway line when a 1000 kg bomb completely demolished the station buildings and started a conflagration among trains loaded with fuel and munitions. Furthermore on 27 January II./KG 3, commanded by Major Waldemar Krüger, carried out a raid on an airfield being used by the Russians to drop airborne troops into the Vyazma area. Huge damage was done, the field's fuel store set ablaze and a dozen elderly four-engined Tupolev TB-3 paratroop transports destroyed on the ground.

As January gave way to February it was the Red Army in the field that continued to suffer most at the hands of the *Gefechtsverband's* Ju 88s. On 13 February machines of II./KG 54 strafed an enemy ski column, virtually wiping it out. However the following day two of its Ju 88s – one flown by the *Kommandeur*, Hauptmann Heinz Gehrke – failed to return from a mission sent out against Russian troop movements on the Toropez road. It may well have been the Soviet frontline soldier who was feeling the full weight of the Junkers' attacks, but it was undoubtedly *his* ground fire in return that was inflicting the greatest number of casualties upon the Ju 88 units. For although the Red Air Force was now beginning to mount retaliatory raids on the bombers'

The Ju 88C heavy fighter carried a crew of three. In the original of this wartime magazine illustration showing an aircraft of 6.(Eis)/KG 3 at Orsha-South in the spring of 1942, II. *Gruppe's* white lightning bolt and its red shield background can both be clearly made out. But note too the small white disc on the nose of the machine. This bears the black 'songbird on a tree branch' motif, which was II./KG 3's original badge dating back to the days before the war



Orsha airfields, mainly under the cover of darkness, these were, by comparison, causing very little damage.

On 4 March II./KG 54 lost three more aircraft during low-level strikes against road convoys in the vicinity of Rzhev. Two crews survived and returned safely to base. The third, that of Oberleutnant Günther Seubert, the *Staffelkapitän* of 4./KG 54 and acting *Gruppenkommandeur*, was posted missing. Later in the month the *Gefechtsverband's* units started to focus their attention on the enemy's lines of supply in those regions astride the boundary between Army Groups Centre and North. A resurgence of activity in the north – not least the heavy fighting around Demyansk and Cholm – had already led to the temporary detachment of both I./KG 3 and I./KG 77 to the *Luftflotte* 1 area.

Throughout April and into May, although still occasionally called upon to bomb the now much more quiescent enemy salients, the central sector Ju 88 units concentrated their efforts mainly on railway traffic deeper to the Russian rear. To help them in their task they had already received a small number of cannon-armed Ju 88C heavy fighters which, in the right hands, proved effective train busters. No longer having to confront the ground fire thrown up at them by frontline troops, casualty figures among the bombers' crews fell considerably during this period.

They did not disappear altogether, of course. On 21 May Knight's Cross wearer Oberleutnant Ernst Petzold, the *Staffelkapitän* of 5./KG 54, was severely wounded by an anti-aircraft burst while dive-bombing the railway station at Yukhno. And just 24 hours later Leutnant Horst Deutschbein, who had taken over leadership of the *Staffel* in Petzold's absence, was himself shot down by a LaGG fighter during an attack on another station in the same region. A second victim of 22 May's anti-railway operations was Major Waldemar Krüger, *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./KG 3, who was shot down by anti-aircraft fire along a stretch of track southeast of Vyazma.

Coincidentally, this same date also saw the last of the three Knight's Crosses awarded to Ju 88 crew members during the spring 1942 campaign on the Moscow front. The first had been presented on 16 April to the *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./KG 77, Hauptmann Joachim Poetter, and the second to Oberleutnant Horst Müller of II./KG 76 on 3 May. That won on 22 May went to one of Poetter's veteran NCO pilots, Oberfeldwebel Horst Henning, who had flown 300+ missions and whose successes included the destruction of 23 trains.

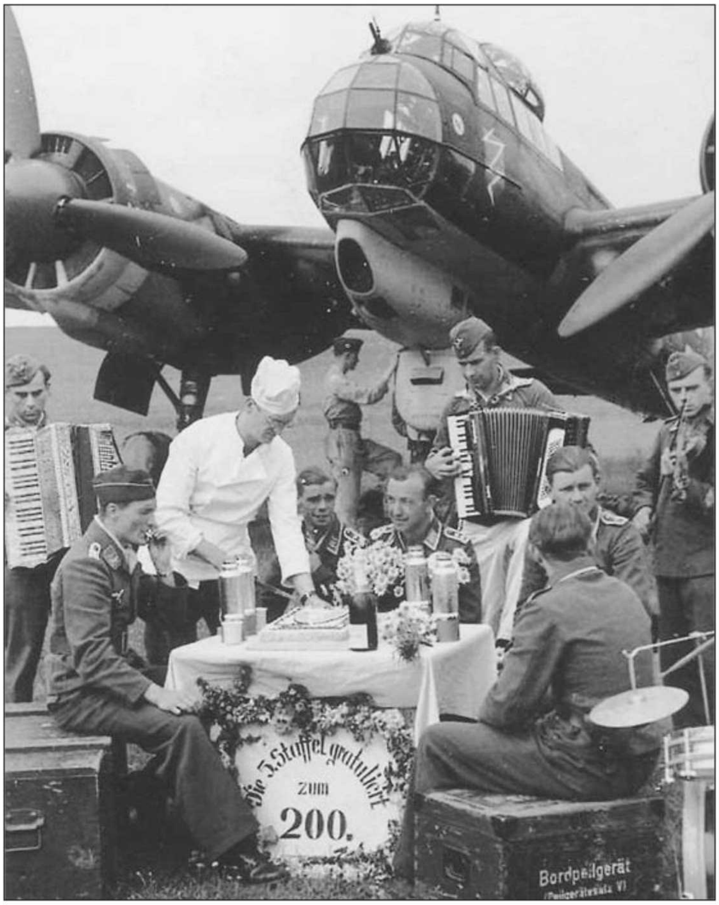
By this time significant changes were taking place on the eastern front. The *Gruppen* of the *Gefechtsverband Bormann* can be said to have fulfilled their purpose inasmuch as they had helped the ground forces on the central sector to 'stand fast' – as per the *Führer's* orders – in the face of heavy Soviet pressure. The Red Army's winter counter-offensives had been largely repulsed (or had simply run out of steam, depending upon the historical viewpoint one chooses to subscribe to). Now the main weight of operations was about to switch to the southern sector.

Generaloberst von Richthofen's close-support VIII. *Fliegerkorps* had been transferred down to the Crimea at the beginning of May. The command now responsible for the central sector was the newly created *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* (more accurately, the retitled V. *Fliegerkorps*). The *Gruppen* of the erstwhile *Gefechtsverband Bormann*, their work done, were already dispersing. II./KG 30 had long since departed for the

In January 1943 one of III./KG 3's *Staffeln* was also re-equipped with C-6's for train-busting operations. The machine seen here carries both the III. *Gruppe* badge (red lightning bolt on a yellow shield) and the device chosen by the *Staffel* in question, 9.(Eis)/KG 3, to reflect its new role: the 'Winged wheel' emblem of the *Reichsbahn*, or German State Railways. The officer pictured is Leutnant Udo Cordes, the *Staffel's* most successful *'Loktöter'* ('Loco-killer'). In the first five months of the unit's existence he destroyed no fewer than 77 locomotives – 41 in one three-week period alone on the River Donetz sector. This performance would earn him the Knight's Cross on 25 May 1943

Netherlands, where it would re-equip before returning to the far northern theatre. I./KG 77 was likewise to head west – to Creil, in France – for re-equipment and its subsequent redesignation as I./KG 6. Three *Gruppen* were ordered down to the southern sector, II. and III./KG 76 to the Crimea during May, and I./KG 54 to Kharkov in June.

This left just Oberst Heinrich Conrady's KG 3 to continue operations on the central sector of the frontline as the sole Ju 88 *Kampfgeschwader* assigned to *Lw.Kdo.Ost*. Throughout the coming summer months KG 3 would keep up the campaign against the Soviets' rear area road and rail networks. These activities were interspersed with other missions flown in more direct support of the troops on the ground. In June, for example, I./KG 3 would again see action on the northern sector, this time assisting KG 1 in the reduction of the Lyuban pocket. And later the following month a renewed enemy counter-offensive in the Rzhev area – intended primarily to relieve pressure on the southern front – would see KG 3 committed against a now numerically far superior Red Air Force.



A pair of accordionists, a solo violinist and an unseen drummer provide the musical accompaniment as the *Staffel* chef cuts the cake to celebrate the 200th mission of 5./KG 3's Oberfeldwebel Friedrich Kralemann (centre). Kralemann flew his 260th, and last, mission on 10 September 1942 when, despite severe injuries that were to cost him his left eye, he managed to bring his crippled machine – minus cabin roof canopy and ventral gondola – back to base. Over a year later, on 29 October 1943, Kralemann was awarded the Knight's Cross, before finally succumbing to his wounds on 1 December 1943. The machine in the background of this photograph from happier times also carries both the II. *Gruppe* 'lightning' badge and the earlier 'songbird' emblem in the small white disc ahead of it

Flying as many as four sorties a day, Conrady's crews suffered accordingly. On the last day of June alone the *Geschwader* lost eight of its aircraft. During July and August KG 3 would lose more than 30 machines in all, and suffer many more damaged. This may not seem unduly excessive at first glance, but it was higher than any other Ju 88 *Kampfgeschwader* then serving on the eastern front. When measured against the unit's average serviceability figures of just 16 aircraft per *Gruppe*, it represented a casualty rate of very nearly 65 per cent.

Yet as hard as KG 3 may have been finding it on the central sector, it was to the south that the main battle was now being fought.

ADVANCE IN THE SOUTH

At the beginning of 1942 the only Ju 88 bomber unit on the southern sector was KG 51, whose three *Gruppen* were based at Tiraspol, Zaporozhe and Nikolayev, respectively. The south had not escaped counter-attack by the Red Army during the winter months, and elements of Oberst Paul Koester's *Geschwader* had already covered the withdrawal of German troops from Rostov back to the River Mius line during the closing weeks of 1941. Now Soviet amphibious landings around Kerch, on the easternmost tip of the Crimea, were jeopardising German operations elsewhere on the peninsula, which had still not yet been fully conquered.

In order to help alleviate the situation, the Luftwaffe hastily set up the *Sonderstab Krim* (Special Staff Crimea) in mid-January 1942. Tasked primarily with 'the interdiction of Soviet supply and troop movements on to the Crimea by sea and by ice road and the bombing of troop assemblies and concentrations, particularly around Kerch, but also in the rear areas', the *Sonderstab's* striking power comprised two *Stukagruppen* and three *Kampfgruppen*, one of the latter being the Nikolayev-based III./KG 51.

A celebration of another kind. Not the 60th operation of another II./KG 3 aircraft as might at first glance be supposed, but the 600th machine repaired and restored to service by a field maintenance unit, whose members have gathered around to mark the occasion

The history of the *Sonderstab* was to be brief and undistinguished. Among the main factors it had to contend with were the appalling weather conditions over the eastern Crimea at this time. Heavy snowfalls alternating with low cloud or extensive ground fog severely hampered operations. The intense cold and snow also played havoc with the poorly equipped ground organisation. Serviceability figures plunged alarmingly. At one point III./KG 51 reported just four of its machines operational.

The *Gruppe's* troubles were further compounded when, after only four days, it was temporarily despatched northwards to help repulse a major Soviet counter-offensive around Izyum, a town on the River Donetz south of Kharkov. When it resumed operations over the Crimea, it did so not from Nikolayev, but from Saki, a small, unprepared strip close to the western coast of the peninsula itself. On 11 February Reichsmarschall Göring ordered the dissolution of the *Sonderstab Krim*, and it was with relief that the crews of III./KG 51 returned to Nikolayev.

It was while III. *Gruppe* was engaged in the Izyum operations that KG 51 won its second Knight's Cross of the war, awarded on 24 January to Feldwebel Georg Fanderl of 1. *Staffel.* Among the long-serving Fanderl's many achievements was a daring low-level attack on an aircraft factory in the UK and the damaging of a large British troop transport in Suda Bay, Crete, the latter despite his Ju 88 having suffered numerous hits and being about to crash (he would spend 17 hours in a dinghy before being picked up). More recently Fanderl had been credited with sinking the Soviet Black Sea Fleet's 6934-ton cruiser *Krasny Krim* in Sevastopol harbour, although Russian records do not substantiate this claim.

On the day of Fanderl's award I./KG 51 was withdrawn from operations for rest and re-equipment at Odessa. In the weeks ahead Oberst Koester's two remaining *Gruppen* would find themselves fully stretched meeting the many demands made upon their services over both the Ukraine and the Crimea. Even after the disbandment of the *Sonderstab Krim* in mid-February, III./KG 51 would continue to operate in and around the area of the Crimea. Their targets were mainly the

A *Staffel* of KG 51 machines in tight formation low over the rolling landscape of the central Crimea

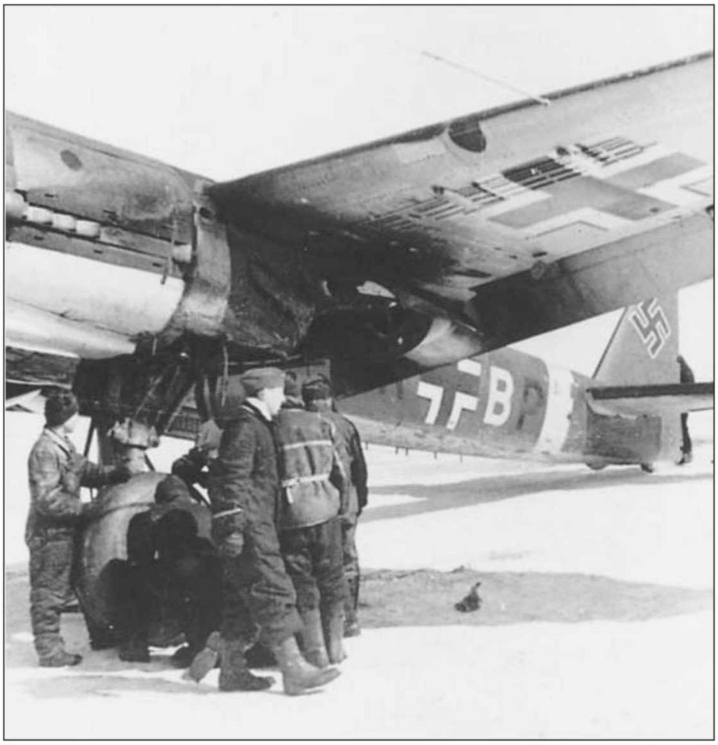
Soviet vessels, naval and merchant, that were supporting and supplying the two Soviet enclaves still holding out on the peninsula, Sevastopol in the west and Kerch in the east.

On 24 February the *Gruppe* was ordered to attack the elderly battleship *Parizhskaya Kommuna* – sister-ship of the Baltic Fleet's *Oktyabrskaya Revolutsiya* – which had been bombarding German coastal positions near Sevastopol. The eight Ju 88s failed to find the 25,464-ton battleship, but did report damaging a heavy cruiser in the same area. Five days later III./KG 51 was in action over the other, eastern end of the peninsula bombing Soviet troops attempting to break out of their Kerch beach-head – a mission from which an 8. *Staffel* Ju 88 failed to return.

Although it was the anti-shipping sorties that were taking up by far the greater part of the *Gruppe's* time and energies, somebody in the corridors of power was clearly not impressed by their performance to date. On 14 March a Ju 88 coded '4D+KM' touched down at Nikolayev. It was the aircraft of KG 30's Hauptmann Werner Baumbach, who had been sent by Oberst Dietrich Peltz to assess III./KG 51's capabilities and, at the same time, impart some of his own knowledge and anti-shipping expertise to the unit. Baumbach wasted little time in familiarising himself with local conditions, flying his first mission with the *Gruppe* over the waters south of the Crimea the very next day.

On 18 March Baumbach accompanied a small formation of Ju 88s led by *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Ernst *Freiherr* von Bibra in an attack on the port of Novorossisk. Despite heavy anti-aircraft fire, they succeeded in damaging a 4629-ton tanker, but an attack on ships in Sevastopol harbour 48 hours later was thwarted by poor weather. A series of raids on Tuapse, however, brought better results. Like Novorossisk, Tuapse was an important Soviet naval base on the Black Sea's Caucasus coastline. The first raid was carried out on 23 March by nine aircraft, with Baumbach in the lead. Their bombs straddled many of the warships berthed in the harbour, although there are conflicting reports on their actual successes. Claims included two minelayers, one motor torpedo boat and one submarine sunk at their moorings, and two other submarines damaged.

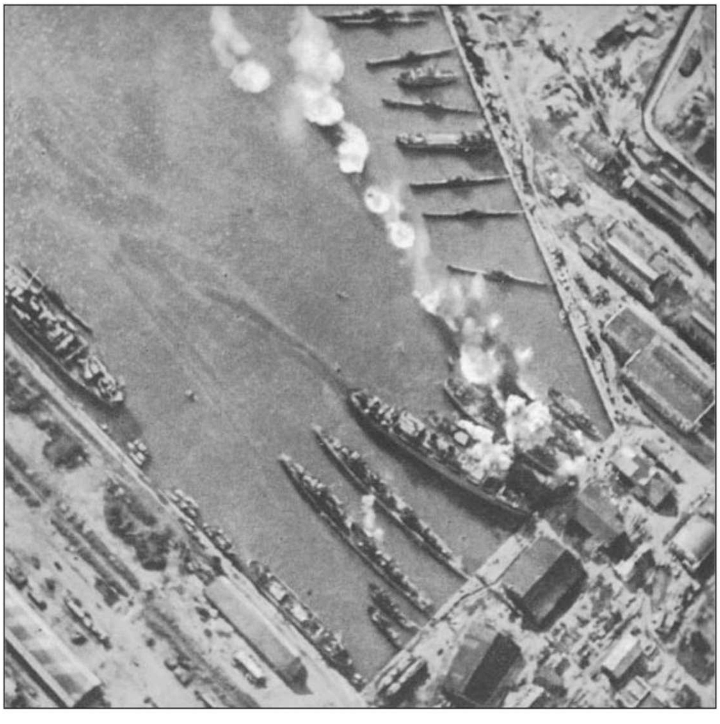
The following day a second attack on the same target resulted in the sinking of a tanker and a submarine depot ship. According to one account, this was the last mission in which Baumbach took part – he had seen enough. After returning to the Reich he reported on his findings. Laying the blame for KG 51's recent poor anti-shipping record on the weather and a shortage of equipment, he dismissed any suggestions of lack of resolve on the part of the crews as being totally baseless.



Not all missions ran smoothly. Groundcrew inspect the damage after 6./KG 51's '9K+BP' landed back at base on 21 March 1942 with its port engine nacelle, wing and undercarriage all showing the effects of a near miss from an anti-aircraft shell. Note that the machine's tailwheel is still retracted, and that it has come to rest on the fuel jettison outlet/emergency tailskid fairing

A final raid on Tuapse on 26 March resulted in damage to a large tanker and a harbour tug at the cost of one 7. *Staffel* crew reported missing. III./KG 51 withdrew to Odessa for seven weeks' rest and re-equipment shortly thereafter. At the same time I. *Gruppe*, its period of refit at Odessa completed, moved up to join II./KG 51 at Zaporozhe. It thus fell to these two *Gruppen* to continue anti-shipping operations over the Black Sea. They suffered losses in the process, including a Ju 88 from 5. *Staffel* that failed to return from a mission on 21 April, during which a transport was sunk and a minesweeper damaged.

April had also seen two more Knight's Crosses for KG 51. Both went to pilots with a wealth of combat experience and a string of successful operations behind them. The first recipient, Hauptmann Rudolf Henne, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9./KG 51, had already amassed 200 missions flying with the *Legion Condor* in Spain. His award was announced on 12 April. 24 hours later Oberleutnant Helmut Klischat of 2. *Staffel* was similarly honoured.



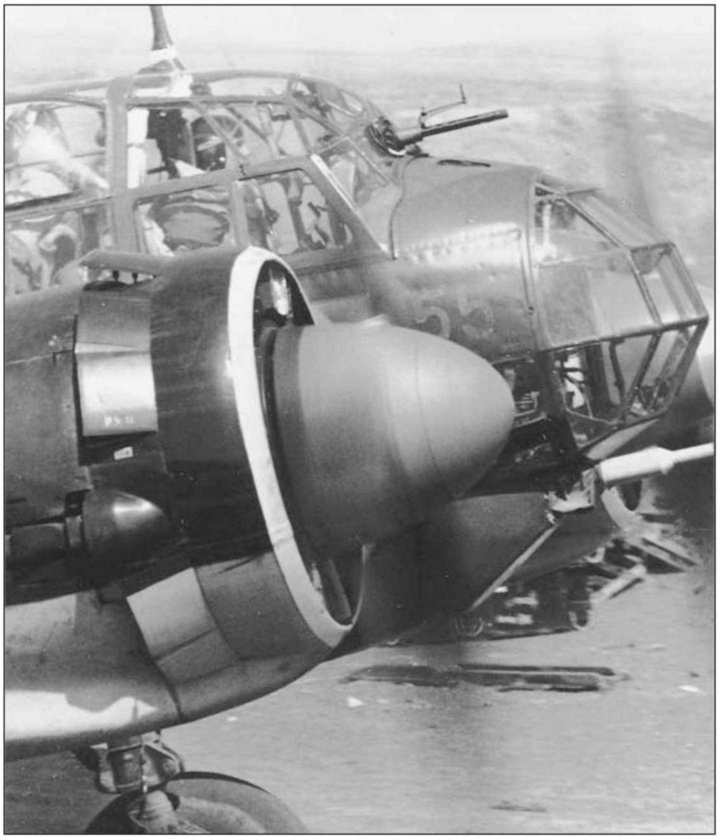
A stick of bombs from an aircraft of III./KG 51 goes down on Tuapse harbour, narrowly missing a row of eight Soviet submarines. This photograph is believed to have been taken during the raid of 23 March 1942, which resulted in the sinking of the 2121-ton auxiliary minelayer ***Nikolai Ostrovsky***, the tug ***Veshilov,*** a small survey vessel (the GS.13) and an unidentified cutter. Two submarines, the D 5 and the S 33, were also damaged

Important though KG 51's anti-shipping activities undoubtedly were, the outcome of any military campaign – and the eastern front was no exception – is determined and decided by the actions of the armies in the field. So in May 1942, with the opposing sides both preparing for their summer offensives, the emphasis of the ground fighting, and with it the supporting operations of the Ju 88 units, began to shift inland.

By 17 May the last Soviet troops had been driven back off the Kerch beachhead. That same day the Red Army's counter-thrust at Izyum exploded into the ferocious 12-day battle for Kharkov that threatened to endanger the stability of the southern sector. All three of KG 51's *Gruppen* at Zaporozhe (III./KG 51 had flown in from Odessa two days earlier) were thrown into the breach around Kharkov. They were in the air almost without pause from dawn till dusk, logging almost 300 individual sorties in one two-day period alone at the height of the battle.

Also heavily involved over the Kharkov area were II. and III./KG 76, the two *Gruppen* that had formed the nucleus of the now defunct *Gefechtsverband* Bormann. They had been transferred down from the central sector earlier in the month to assist KG 51 in clearing the Kerch Peninsula. Together, the five *Gruppen* of Ju 88s played a significant role in helping to smash the Soviet counter-offensive around Kharkov. 29 Red Army divisions were wiped out in the fighting, together with 14 armoured or motorised brigades. Nearly a quarter-of-a-million enemy troops were taken prisoner and 1250 tanks and over 2000 artillery pieces either captured or destroyed. The threat to Army Group South's left flank had been eliminated and the way was now clear for Hitler's own summer offensive. Yet there was one last potential thorn in his side that had to be dealt with first – the fortress harbour of Sevastopol was still holding out on the southwestern tip of the Crimea.

It was for this very purpose that General von Richthofen's VIII. *Fliegerkorps* had also been brought down from the central sector. To provide additional firepower for his close-support Stukas, von Richthofen's command was to be reinforced temporarily by six *Kampfgruppen*, all but one of which were equipped with Ju 88s. I. and III./KG 51 thus departed Kharkov-West for the Crimea, where they were again to operate alongside II. and III./KG 76. The fifth Ju 88 *Gruppe* assigned to von Richthofen was III./LG 1, which had been in Germany since its withdrawal from the Mediterranean theatre at the end of 1941.



Summer 1942 in the Crimea, and the pilot of 8./KG 51's '9K+GS' runs up his engines and starts to roll. In this excellent close-up shot of the business end of a Ju 88, the additional 20 mm MG FF cannon (painted white) projecting from the ventral gondola is clearly visible

An armourer of I./KG 51 takes a well-earned breather in the Crimean sun while his charge ('9K+BL') gets a last-minute check-over. The bombs are standard 'SC' (general purpose) types as indicated by the horizontal yellow stripe painted between the fins

The battle to take the reputedly impregnable fortress of Sevastopol opened on 2 June with the heaviest artillery bombardment yet seen on the eastern front. It was accompanied throughout the hours of daylight by bombing raids flown by every aircraft available to VIII. *Fliegerkorps*. For the four *Gruppen* of KGs 51 and 76 it was a repetition of the Kharkov operations of just two weeks before. The one big difference was that they no longer had to make a 160-mile approach flight to the target area (most of their Kharkov missions having been mounted from Zaporozhe). Sevastopol lay little more than 40 miles away from their new Crimean bases around Sarabuz. This meant that the Ju 88s could each fly three or four separate sorties before they needed refuelling. The crews remained in their aircraft the whole time – even during the brief periods on the ground while the machines were being bombed up again – and were able to take a break only in those intervals when the fuel tanks required refilling.

III./LG 1 was also fully committed, its specific task being to maintain standing patrols over the battle area ready to deal with any particularly troublesome anti-aircraft batteries or field artillery positions impeding the advance of the ground troops. Nor did the vessels of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet escape the destruction being rained down on Sevastopol. Ships continued to run the gauntlet to deliver reinforcements and supplies to the fortress's hard-pressed defenders. On 10 June Ju 88s sank the 1686-ton destroyer *Svobodny* and the 4727-ton auxiliary transport *Abkhaziya*, and damaged the small 441-ton 'Tral' class minesweeper T.413.

The one outstanding achievement by a Ju 88 pilot during the battle for Sevastopol was undoubtedly the single-handed sinking of a huge anti-aircraft raft by Oberleutnant Ernst Hinrichs of 2./KG 51. This craft – 'Floating Anti-aircraft Battery No 3', to give it its proper title – was moored in Severnaya Bay, close to the Sevastopol lighthouse on Cape Kherson. Its 164 anti-aircraft guns dominated the south-western approaches to Sevastopol harbour.

Not unnaturally, most Luftwaffe pilots tried to steer well clear of this hornet's nest. However, on the evening of 19 June Hinrichs and his *Staffelkapitän* took off from Sarabuz with the express intention of putting the flak raft out of action once and for all. Hinrichs was the first to dive on the target, the plan being for him to throw the enemy gunners off their aim and so allow his *Kapitän* a clear run. In the event, Hinrichs himself scored a direct hit. The raft quickly

A pair of III./KG 51 machines ('9K+DS' in the foreground, '9K+FR' to the rear) pictured above the *Tafelberg* (Table Mountain) near Simferopol in the Crimea

An aircraft of KG 51 is refuelled between shuttle raids on Sevastopol

began to sink and the explosion of the tons of ammunition stored in its magazines did the rest.

There were many witnesses to the series of enormous detonations that marked its end. Among them was General von Richthofen himself, who happened to be aloft nearby in his Fieseler Storch. The General was so impressed by Hinrichs' feat that he immediately recommended him for the Knight's Cross. Quite by chance, it was on this very date that a Knight's Cross was awarded to 4./KG 76's Oberleutnant Benno Herrmann. Oberleutnant Ernst Hinrichs did not have to wait long for his – it was presented to him just over a month later, on 25 July.

The reduction of Sevastopol, which was to have taken only four days, in fact lasted that many weeks and more. Towards its end the problem of supply shortages – especially of bombs and ammunition – was once again becoming acute. So desperate was the situation that the Ju 88s were no longer permitted to salvo their bombs. Each had to be carefully aimed and released singly. This meant that in the course of one day's operations pilots were being required to make as many as 32 separate dives.

Despite such difficulties Sevastopol finally fell on 1 July. By then Hitler's great 1942 summer offensive on the southern sector was all of three days old. Initially code-named *'Fall Blau'* ('Case Blue'), it had been launched at 0215 hrs on 28 June. Its aim was the capture of the rich industrial areas along the lower reaches of the Rivers Don and Donetz and the extensive oilfields beyond. The first phase of the operation was completed in little more than a week. Then, in his Directive No 45 of 23 July 1942, the *Führer* ordered that the main axis of advance be split into two, with one army group being sent due east towards Stalingrad and the other striking southwards down into the oil-rich Caucasus.

The directive contained precise instructions for the Luftwaffe. The units supporting Army Group B were told that 'the early destruction of the city of Stalingrad is of paramount importance', whereas those covering Army Group A's drive south were warned that 'in view of the decisive importance

An almost vertical shot of Sevastopol harbour taken from a machine of III./KG 76

of the oilfields of the Caucasus for the further prosecution of the war, air attacks against their refineries and storage tanks, and against ports used for oil shipments on the Black Sea, will only be carried out if the operations of the army make them absolutely essential'.

This division of ground forces already dangerously thinly stretched was to have dire consequences. For the Ju 88 units on the southern sector, however, it initially entailed little more than further redeployment.

For the first few days of the offensive those *Gruppen* recently involved against Sevastopol were to remain *in situ* in the Crimea, albeit now under the control of IV. *Fliegerkorps.* On 2 July *Gruppenkommandeur* Hanns Heise led his I./KG 76, together with the He 111s of I./KG 100, in a highly successful operation against ports along the Caucasus coast. The Soviet Black Sea Fleet's 2893-ton *Tashkent*, a destroyer flotilla leader that had recently made more than 40 round trips to Sevastopol in her temporary role as a fast transport, was sent to the bottom of Novorossisk harbour, as was the 1660-ton destroyer *Bditelny.* Three transport ships were also sunk, together with several smaller vessels.

A day or two later KG 76 was transferred up to the Voronezh area, where it was to form the nucleus of the newly established *Gefechtsverband Nord* (the 'Nord' in this instance referring not to the northern sector, but to the left-hand, or northernmost flank of Army Group South). Crews were greeted shortly after their arrival by heavy enemy air raids on their airfields. Despite suffering 'considerable losses', they were soon in action targeting rail junctions ahead of the advancing 4. *Panzerarmee.*

Immediately to their south the only unit now in the Kharkov area – jumping-off point for 6. *Armee's* drive on Stalingrad – was Hauptmann Otto Köhnke's II./KG 54, which had flown down from Bryansk, on the central sector, two weeks earlier. They were not to remain at Kharkov for long, however. Indicative perhaps of the growing confusion that was beginning to permeate the Luftwaffe High Command, II./KG 54 unexpectedly received orders on 8 July to transfer to northern France for operations over the UK, but its time at Beauvais was to be equally brief. Staying only long enough to lose four aircraft over southern England, and for Otto Köhnke to be awarded the Knight's Cross (on 1 August), the *Gruppe* was rushed back to the eastern front two weeks later.

The unit returned not to Kharkov, but to Shatalovka on the central sector. It was from here, using the airfields at Vyazma and Bryansk as forward landing grounds, that II./KG 54 conducted its final operations in the east. These were flown mainly in support of Army Group Centre's northern flank where the Russians were making strenuous efforts to break through the German front around Rzhev. Among the many casualties suffered by the *Gruppe* during this period was *Kommandeur* Hauptmann Otto Köhnke himself, who was severely injured in a deadstick landing on 27 September after both his engines had been knocked out by anti-aircraft fire. Köhnke lost a leg as a result of his injuries. He would subsequently hold various staff and training appointments before returning to active service as CO of the now infamous *Kommando* Elbe in the closing weeks of the war (see *Osprey Aviation Elite Units 20*).

II./KG 54 flew its last operation on the Russian front on 9 October. Four days later the *Gruppe* was ordered back to the Reich, prior to rejoining its parent *Geschwader* in the Mediterranean.

The Black Sea looks deceptively tranquil as a Ju 88 returns to base guided by the light of the evening sun

On the southernmost wing of the 1942 summer offensive 17. *Armee* had been tasked first with retaking Rostov – initially captured by German forces early in November 1941, only to be regained by the Russians before that same month was out – and then pushing on down into the Caucasus. To provide air cover for these operations the *Geschwaderstab* KG 51, under new *Kommodore* Major Wilhelm von Friedeburg, was transferred forward to Stalino, together with I. and III. *Gruppen*, on 10 July. II./KG 51 meanwhile was to remain at Zaporozhe.

This left Hauptmann Hermann Hogeback's III./LG 1 as the only Ju 88 *Gruppe* still operating over the Black Sea area, where it continued to fly anti-shipping missions as part of *Fliegerführer Süd*.

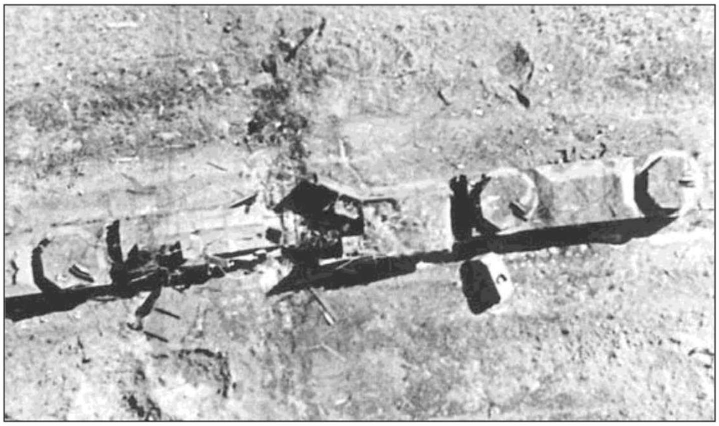
Within two days of its launch *'Fall Blau'* had been renamed Operation *'Braunschweig'* ('Brunswick'). In its early stages all went according to plan. As far as the Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* were concerned this entailed KG 76 supporting the northern flank of the advance, and KG 51 the southern. Among the latter's early targets were the bridges over the Donetz and Don rivers. It was during one such mission on 12 July that Soviet fighters shot down the aircraft flown by Knight's Cross holder Oberleutnant Helmut Klischat. KG 51 next attacked the enemy's rail network beyond the Don and down into the Kalmyk Steppe of the northern Caucasus. Then, after the fall of Rostov on 23 July, the *Geschwader* began to strike at Soviet lines of communication deeper in the Caucasus.

It was also on 23 July that the hitherto combined southern offensive was divided into two separate and increasingly divergent lines of advance, one aimed at Stalingrad and the other at the oilfields of the Caucasus. As the attack on Stalingrad began to gain in importance, this in turn would lead to KG 51's previously clearly defined areas of operations becoming ever more blurred. One source maintains that the *Geschwader* was diverted from the southern regions to fly its first raid on Stalin's namesake city on 27 July, adding that it celebrated its 15,000th sortie of the war just two days later.

The first week of August brought further redeployment, with I. and III./KG 51 moving from Stalino down to Kerch, on the eastern tip of the Crimea. This placed them much nearer to their targets in the western Caucasus and to the enemy-held ports along its Black Sea coastline. Like most other Ju 88 *Kampfgeschwader* in Russia, KG 51 was now operating a small number of cannon-armed Ju 88C-6 heavy fighters, and these were employed to good effect against Soviet coastal shipping. However the two *Gruppen* were soon on the move again. On 19 August, after just a fortnight at Kerch, they were transferred – via Taganrog – to Tazinskaya, an airfield only 150 miles away from Stalingrad.

This meant that as German ground forces closed in on the city, all four of the southern sector's Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* – I. and III./KG 51, and II. and III./KG 76 – would be operating in their

The Red Army made extensive use of armoured trains. This particular example has been put out of commission by a direct hit from a KG 51 bomb. The explosion has blown one of the train's turrets completely off



support. Of the other two *Gruppen*, II./KG 51 was still at Zaporozhe and serving as a quasi maintenance unit for the rest of the *Geschwader*, while III./LG 1 – having been involved in brief action over the Caucasus and then being redesignated III./KG 6 – would be transferred to *Luftflotte* 1 before the end of August and thence back to the Reich for re-equipment.

During KG 51's period of engagement in the Caucasus, Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst Bormann's KG 76 had been tasked with isolating Stalingrad from its rear area bases of supply and reinforcement. On 21 August they had caught two Red Army divisions in the open steppe some 100 miles to the east of the Volga and effectively wiped them out. Two days later, coincident with the launch of the final push on the city, crews of both KG 51 and KG 76 participated in the first major air raids mounted against Stalingrad.

Gefechtsſtand

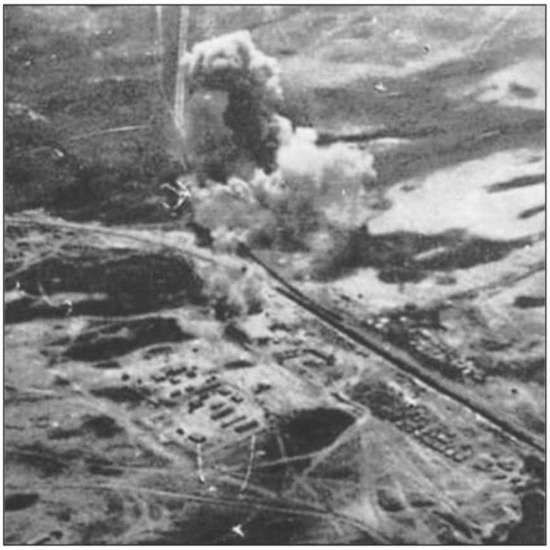
Crews of 7.(Eis)/KG 51 gather outside the ops room to while away the time between missions. On the original print of this photograph – taken in the Crimea, hence the proliferation of life-jackets – it can be seen that the solid nose of the C-6 heavy fighter in the background has been painted with fake transparencies to make it look like a bomber

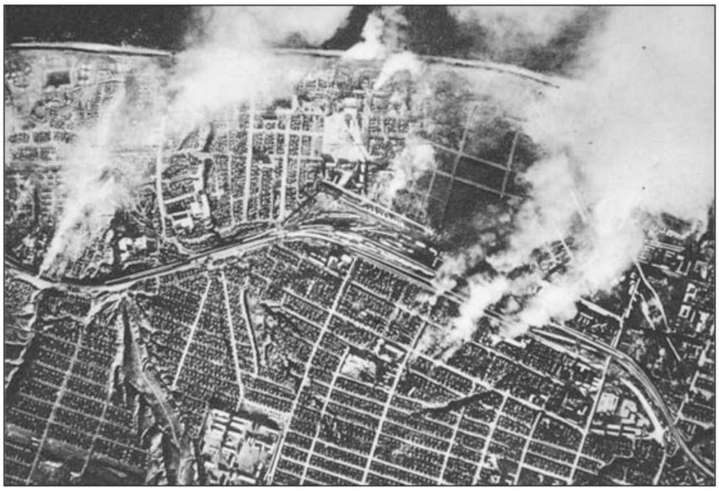
It was during one of the early missions on 23 August that the Ju 88 flown by Major Ernst *Freiherr* von Bibra, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./KG 51, was hit by anti-aircraft fire and forced to make an emergency landing in enemy-held territory close to the River Chir. Seeing the Kommandeur's plight, Oberleutnant Werner Poppenburg of 7./KG 51 – von Bibra's old *Staffel* – landed alongside the crashed aircraft, packed its entire crew aboard his own machine and succeeded in taking off again before the Russians could intervene.

On 30 August the leading German troops broke through the ring of defences around Stalingrad. Heavy fighting raged throughout September as the Red Army withdrew into the city. Despite their many missions flown in support of the ground operations during this period, the Ju 88 *Gruppen* suffered remarkably few losses. Stalingrad's anti-aircraft defences were still relatively weak and ill coordinated (unlike the massed batteries that were later to exact such a terrible toll on the transport Ju 52/3ms attempting to airlift supplies into the then besieged city). In the first week of September two members of KG 76 had been decorated for outstanding leadership, Hauptmann Hanns Heise, the *Kommandeur* of I. *Gruppe*, receiving the Knight's Cross on 3 September, and the following day *Geschwaderkommodore* Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst Bormann being presented with the Oak Leaves.

This sudden proliferation of awards – there were to be four in all in September and double that number in October – could not disguise the fact that the Ju 88 *Gruppen* on the Stalingrad front were by now in a parlous state. Worn down by the near constant round of dive-bombing missions and the unhealthy conditions they were living in, the crews of Major von Bibra's III./KG 51 were withdrawn to the Crimea on 28 September for a period of rest and recuperation. They were followed by I./KG 51 a

III./KG 76 attacks the railway junction at Harlinskaya, north of Stalingrad





One of the early raids on the central railway station district of Stalingrad. Note the west bank of the River Volga running along the top of the picture and the still relatively undamaged state of most of the city's buildings. The strange 'gashes' scarring the street layout below the railway tracks are some of the *balkas*, or natural ravines, that were such a distinctive feature of the Stalingrad terrain

week later. To fill the gap left by their departure, KG 1 was flown down from the northern sector.

Towards the end of October Stalingrad gained a brief respite when the Ju 88s redirected their attentions southwards again. On 25 October II./KG 51, which had joined its parent *Geschwader* in the Crimea, was moved down to Armavir in the Caucasus. From here – the deepest penetration KG 51 would make into the Soviet Union – it carried out raids on a number of targets, including Tuapse. Elements of KG 76 were also active in the same area, claiming the sinking of three merchant ships south of Tuapse on 4 November. But at about 2200 hrs that evening a small bomb from a Russian night harassment aircraft chanced to hit the huge fuel dump on the edge of Armavir airfield. The resulting fires quickly spread to the 'more than 100 Ju 88s and He 111s, many fully fuelled and armed', which packed the field. A tremendous amount of damage was caused. Only one machine of II./KG 51 remained unscathed and over the next few days the crews were returned – minus aircraft – to Bagerovo, in the Crimea, to await the arrival of replacements.

Early November was also to witness the end of KG 76's service on the eastern front. The *Geschwader's* sudden withdrawal from Russia was brought about by the Allied landings in northwest Africa on 8 November. With *Geschwaderkommodore* Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst Bormann then recovering from illness, it fell to KG 51's Major Wilhelm von Friedeburg to take his place and lead KG 76 back to Germany for hurried 'tropicalisation' prior to its transfer to the Mediterranean theatre.

KG 1 disappeared from the Stalingrad front at about this same time when Major Hans Keppler was ordered to take his *Geschwader* back to the northern sector. This left just one Ju 88 *Gruppe* operating in direct support of the ground troops struggling to take the city. On 3 November I./KG 51, under recently appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Fritzherbert 'Fritze' Dierich, had flown back in to Tazinskaya after its brief period of rest in the Crimea. However with the onset of winter the conditions that awaited crews – snow, icy winds and freezing temperatures – were even worse than before. They took to the air whenever the weather allowed, but a single *Gruppe* stood little chance of influencing the inevitable course of events. On 22 November two massive Soviet counter-offensives to the north and south of Stalingrad

These groundcrew of KG 51 appear to be coping quite well with their second winter on the eastern front as they ready one of the *Geschwader's* aircraft for its next mission, against Rostov-on-Don, on 12 January 1943

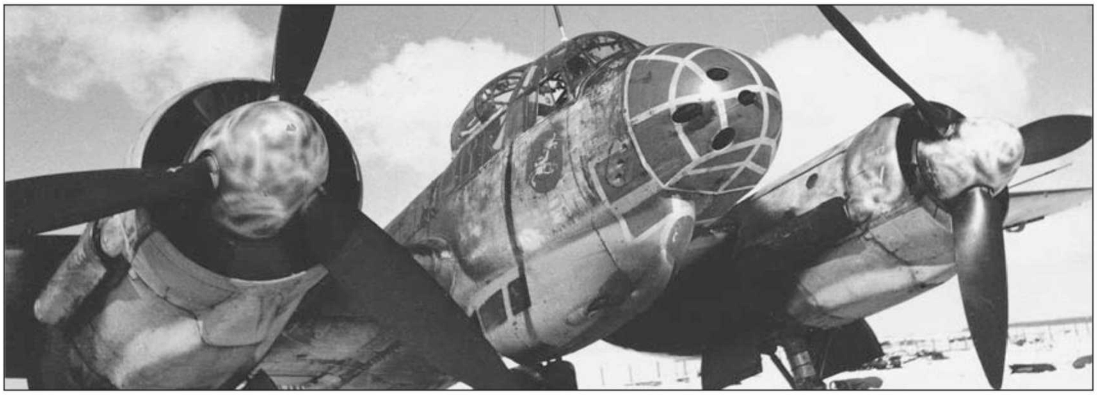
linked up at Kalach on the Don, completely encircling the city and trapping Generaloberst Friedrich Paulus' 6. *Armee* within its ruins.

On 7 December I./KG 51 retired from Tazinskaya back to Rostov. The large, if underdeveloped expanses of Tazinskaya and Morosovskaya – soon dubbed 'Tazi' and 'Moro' – had been selected as the main termini for the airlift operations that Reichsmarschall Göring had rashly promised would keep the now besieged defenders of Stalingrad supplied with all their needs. During their first few days at Rostov Major Dierich's crews were engaged on missions aimed at helping shore up the crumbling Don front. They were even called upon to drop leaflets to Rumanian army units urging them not to retreat any further, all to no avail.

I./KG 51 was next tasked with supporting 4. *Panzerarmee's* attempt to break through to Stalingrad from the south. This was launched on 12 December and made good progress at first. Despite every effort, including III./KG 51's arrival at Rostov on 20 December to add its weight to the operation, this too ultimately ended in failure. Having fought to within 30 miles of the Stalingrad perimeter, 4. *Panzerarmee* could get no further. The relief effort had to be called off on 24 December. The city's fate was sealed. The newly promoted Generalfeldmarschall Paulus would surrender it, and the surviving 250,000 troops of his 6. *Armee*, to the Russians on 31 January 1943.

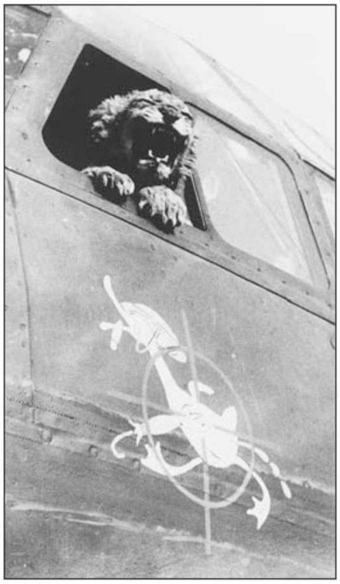
By that time, however, I. and III./KG 51 had long been ordered to turn their backs on the unfolding tragedy. They were now responsible for covering the retreat of the German forces streaming northwards out of the Caucasus. In this they were more successful, despite the mounting chaos and confusion that surrounded them. 'Everything went wrong, nothing worked any more. There was a lack of bombs, equipment, spare parts and fuel for the machines'.

Having to fly anything up to five low-level missions a day against Soviet troop columns resulted in a growing number of losses. On 3 January 1943 Oberst Heinrich Conrady had arrived at Rostov to take over the *Geschwader* from the departed Major von Friedeburg. Having spent the previous 14 months at the head of KG 3, Conrady was of the old school of bomber *Kommodores*, and one of the remaining few never to have undergone pilot training. Instead, it had become his custom during pre-op briefings before a mission to choose a crew with whom he would fly in the role of navigator-observer. Unfortunately, the crew he selected five days after assuming command of KG 51 was that of 6. *Staffel's* Oberleutnant



Few, if any, train-busting *Staffeln* took such elaborate care in painting the noses of their C-6 heavy fighters as did 4.(Eis)/KG 76. Here the fake glazing has even been carried down on to the ventral gondola. This somewhat weather-beaten machine also wears the *Staffel* badge, first introduced in 1940 for operations over England, but now decidedly anachronistic in the depths of a Russian winter more than two years later. It depicts a defecating goose wearing a British tin hat, smoking Churchill's cigar and carrying Chamberlain's umbrella, all centred behind a bombsight...

...which can be seen in much greater detail in this close-up shot of one of 4./KG 76's earlier A-5 bombers. The snarling face at the pilot's window was presumably the *Staffel* mascot!



The irrepressible Oberleutnant Alfons 'Ali' Berger, *Staffelkapitän* of 1./KG 51, whose many successes included 'one tank sunk'

Edwin Stöhr, whose '9K+AP' was downed in flames by flak. One source claims that this was the start of a run of 'particularly bad luck, with I. *Gruppe* alone losing 13 crews in the space of just three days'.

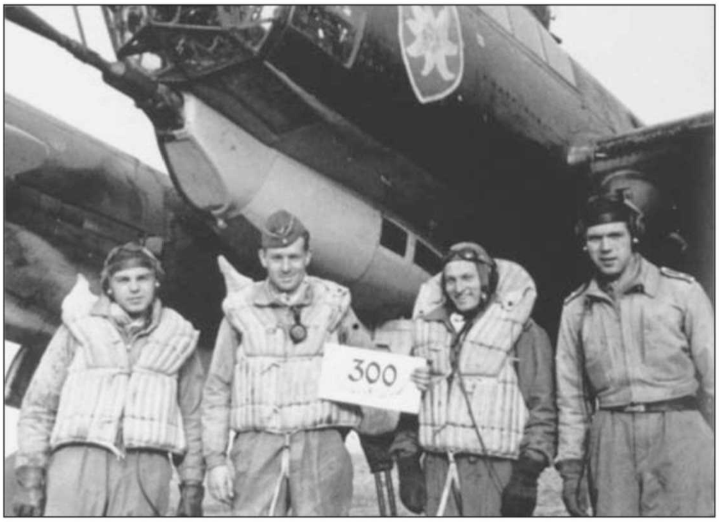
One of the last of the month's casualties was the popular Kapitän of 1. *Staffel*, Oberleutnant Alfons 'Ali' Berger, among whose successes was listed 'One tank sunk' – a cryptic reference to a Soviet armoured vehicle bombed while apparently attempting to negotiate the frozen shallows of the Sea of Azov. On 27 January, during a mission flown in support of an SS armoured division, one of 'Ali' Berger's engines was hit as he attacked a group of enemy tanks. Unable to control his machine, he attempted to make a belly landing, only for the aircraft to explode just seconds before he touched down.

AFTERMATH

On 31 January 1943, the day Generalfeldmarschall Friedrich Paulus surrendered Stalingrad, the six Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* remaining on the Russian front together mustered a total of exactly 88 serviceable aircraft. The battle of Stalingrad has long been regarded as the turning point of the war in the east, but it also marked the beginning of the end of the Ju 88's career as a bomber on the eastern front. For of those six *Gruppen* operational in Russia on 31 January 1943, just one *Gruppe* and one *Staffel* – 20 serviceable machines in all – would remain by year end. The story of the Ju 88's rapid decline is perhaps best and most clearly described if each of the three main sectors is taken in turn.

The northern sector was the first to lose the services of the Ju 88, with *Luftflotte* 1 bidding farewell to the last elements of the long-resident KG 1 in April 1943. After re-equipping in the Reich, Hauptmann Werner Kanther's III./KG 1 had returned to Dno, southwest of Lake Ilmen, in late January. During February it was to operate primarily against the enemy's lines of communication in the Volkhov, Staraya Russa and Cholm areas, before being joined briefly by the *Geschwaderstab* and I. *Gruppe* in the latter half of March. It was at Dno on 18 March that Major Horst von Riesen, hitherto the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./KG 1, took over command of the *Geschwader* from Major Heinrich Lau.

Throughout March and into April KG 1's units kept up their attacks – mainly by night – on the Soviet rail network, concentrating on the stretch of line between Volkhov and Tichwin. But on 7 April I. *Gruppe* was ordered back to Germany to refit and, less than three weeks later, III./KG 1 was transferred down to the central sector. The latter's departure from Dno on 26 April marked the end of Ju 88 bomber operations in the north.



Future Knight's Cross recipient Major Klaus Häberlen, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./KG 51, proudly holds the placard indicating his 300th operational mission, flown on 17 April 1943. Life jackets, such as the early kapok style being worn here by Häberlen and two of his crew, were essential items of equipment for overwater operations from the Crimea. Note the 20 mm MG FF cannon mounted in the ventral gondola

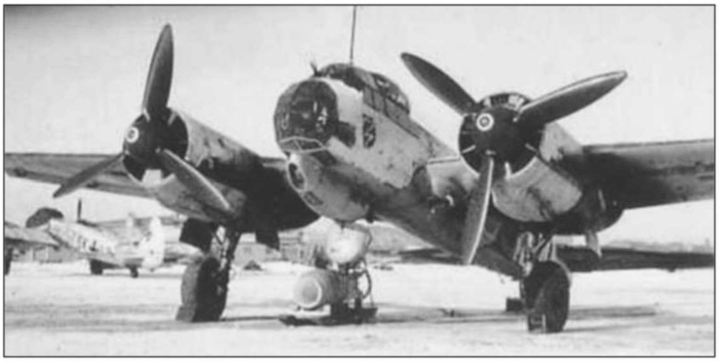
On the southern sector the Ju 88 would remain in service with *Luftflotte* 4 throughout 1943, albeit only in single *Gruppe* strength during the latter half of the year. After covering the retreat of Axis forces out of the Caucasus back across the lower Don in January 1943, both I. and III./KG 51 had themselves been forced to vacate Rostov on 5 February in the face of the approaching enemy. The two *Gruppen* retired to Zaporozhe to rejoin II./KG 51. Upon their arrival they took over II. *Gruppe's* aircraft, the latter then being withdrawn from service to rest and refit.

Zaporozhe was to provide only a temporary haven from the oncoming Soviet tide. I. and III./KG 51's primary purpose now was to try to halt the advance of the enemy's armoured spearheads. At one point Russian tanks were reported to be less than ten miles from the field's perimeter. When, on 15 February, an SS *Panzerkorps* gave up Kharkov without a fight – and against Hitler's strict instructions – Major Klaus Häberlen's I. *Gruppe* was ordered to support the same corps in recapturing this important industrial and communications centre. It would take a full month, even with the help of I./KG 1 brought down from the central sector especially for the purpose.

Meanwhile III./KG 51 had resumed their activities in support of the ground troops still attempting to extricate themselves from the Caucasus, either by retreating back over the Don or by retiring into the Kuban bridgehead just across the narrow Straits of Kerch from the eastern Crimea. At first III. *Gruppe* continued to operate out of Zaporozhe, only to lose its long-serving *Kommandeur* and recent Knight's Cross recipient Major Ernst *Freiherr* von Bibra, who failed to return from a mission on 15 February. It was therefore under new *Kommandeur* Hauptmann Wilhelm Rath that III./KG 51 transferred down to Bagerovo, in the Crimea, on 27 February.

It was joined there by I./KG 51 just over a month later, and together the two *Gruppen* carried out yet more operations over the Caucasus. The Ju88C-6 heavy fighters of 7. *Staffel*– more accurately 7.(Eis)/KG 51 – were particularly successful against the Soviet rail network in the region. Another weapon to prove its worth during this period was the tiny 2 kg SD 2 'Butterfly' bomb, smaller cousin to the SD 10 fragmentation bomb that had proved such a hazard to Ju 88 crews at the very start of *Barbarossa.* Dropped from higher altitudes in an AB 23 container,

One of just six Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* still operating on the Russian front come January 1943, II./KG 3 was subordinated to *Luftwaffenkommando Don*



Widely dispersed against air attack on a desolate expanse of snow, this shot of III./KG 1 machines early in 1943 – probably at Dno – neatly encapsulates the two enemies faced by the Luftwaffe in Russia – the Red Air Force and the weather. Note the bomb visible beneath the wing centre-section of 'V4+CT' in the foreground. From the unit's loss tables it is apparent that at this time 9.(Eis)/KG 1 was operating both C-6 heavy fighters *and* standard A-4 bombers

these 'devilish little devices' inflicted heavy casualties on the Red Army units chasing hot on the heels of the retreating Germans.

Then, on 19 April, I./KG 51 was suddenly sent to Poltava, in the Ukraine. There, after almost three weeks of near inactivity, the *Gruppe* received notice of an even more surprising transfer. On 8 May it was to return to the Reich to begin conversion onto the Me 410.

At the same time both II. and III./KG 51 (the former now back on operations) were despatched up to Bryansk on the central sector. On the way they lost their *Kommodore*. Major Egbert von Frankenberg und Proschlitz had taken over the *Geschwader* from Oberst Conrady back in January. His non-arrival at Bryansk on 9 May raised some questions. Had he fallen victim to enemy action, or perhaps been forced down behind enemy lines by mechanical failure of some sort? A third alternative, that he had deliberately landed in Soviet territory, was at first dismissed out of hand.

Yet within days the good Major's voice was heard on Radio Moscow exhorting German troops not to lay down their lives 'for a criminal regime', but to come over to the Russians and build for themselves a peaceful, socialist life in the east. Any lingering doubts as to where von Frankenberg's true loyalties lay were dispelled when it was learned that he had become one of the founding members of the 'National Committee of Free Germany' and co-founder of the 'Association of German Officers' in the Soviet Union – both of which organisations would later play a major role in establishing the government of post-war East Germany.

KG 51's two *Gruppen* were replaced on the southern sector by I. and II./KG 3, and it was the latter two units which would provide the Ju 88 presence along the southern shoulder of the Kursk salient during Operation *Zitadelle* two months later. However the premature collapse of Hitler's armoured counter-offensive around Kursk in mid-July led to further reduction and redeployment of the *Kampfgruppen* in the east.

Late in August – in the aftermath of the historic battle of Kursk – the *Gruppen* of KGs 3 and 51 again exchanged places, with I. and II./KG 3 returning to the central sector and II./KG 51 resuming operations around Kirovograd in the south. It was not long, however, before this last unit was on the move again. On 18 September II./KG 51 was unexpectedly transferred to Salonika, in Greece, to participate

Mission completed, smiling crewmen of III./KG 51, wearing a mix of kapok and inflatable life jackets, make their way past the unit standard at Sarabuz, in the Crimea, in May 1943

in the recapture of the Dodecanese Islands in the eastern Mediterranean. This in turn resulted in I./KG 3's hasty recall from the central front to fill the void left by II./KG 51's departure.

The dozen or so serviceable machines of I./KG 3 would thus be the only Ju 88 bombers contesting the Red Army's advance through the Ukraine for much of the last quarter of 1943. It was not until II./KG 51's return from the Mediterranean at the end of November that I./KG 3 was taken off operations for a well-earned rest and refit. II./KG 51's final stint in Russia was to be even briefer than its recent foray down into Greece. After supporting the ground fighting around Zhitomir and Cherkassy during December, Major Herbert Voss's *Gruppe* was pulled back to Vinnitsa on 4 January 1944 and thence – via Lublin, in Poland – to the west, where it joined the rest of KG 51 in converting to the Me 410.

Thus, by the winter of 1943/44, the Ju 88 bomber had disappeared entirely from both the northern and southern sectors of the Russian front, but what of events on the central sector following the loss of Stalingrad?

Since the transfer of *Luftflotte* 2 to the Mediterranean at the end of 1941, the central sector had undergone a succession of command changes. Responsibility for the area had first been assumed by VIII. *Fliegerkorps*, which had in turn been replaced by *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* (the ex-V. *Fliegerkorps*) in April 1942. Four months later a new command – *Luftwaffenkommando Don* (the temporarily redesignated I. *Fliegerkorps*) – had then been inserted into the widening gap between *Lw.Kdo.Ost* and *Luftflotte* 4 to its immediate south. It was not until 6 May 1943, 18 months after the withdrawal of *Luftflotte* 2, that the central sector would again be controlled by an Air Fleet, this being the date when *Lw.Kdo.Ost* was officially retitled *Luftflotte* 6.

At the time of its creation *Luftflotte* 6 had just one Ju 88 *Kampfgruppe* under its command. This was Hauptmann Werner Kanther's III./KG 1, which had flown in to Sechinskaya from the northern sector ten days earlier, but the Air Fleet's Ju 88 strength was soon bolstered by the arrival at Bryansk of both II. and III./KG 51 (on 8 and 10 May respectively) from the south.

Throughout May and June the three *Gruppen* operated mainly over the Kursk and Voronezh areas, flying dusk and night missions against Red Army troop concentrations and their rear area lines of supply. The Ju 88s also took part in several nocturnal raids of a more strategic nature during this period. Among the targets they attacked were the tank factory and iron foundries at Gorki, east of Moscow, on 2 June and the Yaroslavl chemical works north of the Soviet capital 18 days later. A number of crews were reported missing during these operations, and KG 51 was fortunate not to lose its new *Kommodore* in a night raid on Yelets, to the northeast of Kursk, at this time. Major Hanns Heise's aircraft was severely damaged, but he managed to nurse it back to friendly territory before he and his crew took to their parachutes.

As June drew to a close the three Ju 88 *Gruppen* began to mount daylight army support missions over the Kursk-Orel regions in preparation for Hitler's forthcoming counter-offensive. Launched on 5 July, Operation *Zitadelle* was the *Führer's* last great gamble in the east. Most accounts of the Luftwaffe's role in the battle of Kursk rightly concentrate on the activities of the ground-attack units. However from

The summer storm clouds gather as the battle of Kursk approaches. Its outcome will herald the virtual end of Ju 88 bomber operations on the Russian front

their bases on the northern flank of the Kursk salient – III./KG 1 having transferred from Sechinskaya to Orel-West on 9 June – the Ju 88 crews played no less important a part in *Zitadelle*, flying day and night against artillery positions, tank assembly areas, troop columns and truck convoys. The Ju 88C-6 heavy fighters of 9.(Eis)/KG 1 and 7.(Eis)/KG 51 proved particularly effective against these latter targets (their performance being mirrored by the C-6s of 6.(Eis)/KG 3 currently operating in similar fashion along the southern shoulder of the salient).

The abandonment of *Zitadelle* after little more than a week of fighting – a move brought about by a combination of events in the Mediterranean and, closer to home, a major Russian counter-attack around Orel on the northern flank of the Kursk 'bulge' – led to all three central sector Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* retiring to Sechinskaya before July was out. It was only now, at this late stage of the air war in the east, that the decision was finally taken to concentrate the Luftwaffe's bomber forces under one command and employ them 'as an instrument of strategic aerial warfare'. Hitherto, it was estimated, they had been flying 80 per cent of their operations in direct or indirect support of the ground forces over the battlefield. Now three complete *Kampfgeschwader* were to be sent back to rear area bases in Poland for training in their new role.

Ironically, this decision drove another nail into the coffin of the Ju 88's bombing career on the Russian front for the new eastern strategic bomber force was to be composed primarily of units flying the venerable He 111, whereas the remaining Ju 88 *Gruppen* were either to be transferred to other theatres for operations against the western Allies, or temporarily withdrawn from service for re-equipment with newer types of aircraft.

This new policy resulted in fundamental changes on the central sector in the weeks following *Zitadelle*. By the end of August II./KG 51 had been despatched back to the southern sector, and III./KG 51 returned to the Reich for conversion onto the Me 410. Meanwhile, two of III./KG 1's *Staffeln* had departed by rail for Flensburg in northern Germany, where they were to re-equip with the Ju 88P-1.

Armed with a seven-round 75mm Pak 40L anti-tank gun in a large ventral gondola, this variant of the Ju 88 was intended specifically for the tank-busting role. In the event, III. *Gruppe* never completed their planned conversion and KG 1 ended its war flying four-engined He 177s.

The premature ending of *Zitadelle* did not mean an end to the casualties. This partially night-camouflaged machine of III./KG 51 – '9K+XS'? – was lucky to make it back to Krimskaya for a belly-landing after an anti-aircraft burst had mangled its starboard wing and tailplane on 29 July 1943

To fill the gap thus left on the central front, I. and II. *Gruppen* of Oberst Walter Lehwess-Litzmann's KG 3 were flown back up from the south, and the only *Staffel* of KG 1 still operating out of Sechinskaya, Hauptmann Wilhelm Wölfing's 9.(Eis)/KG 1, was placed under their command. Coincidentally, the then Major Lehwess-Litzmann had led III./KG 1's for the first four months of *Barbarossa*, but the train-busters of 9. *Staffel* had little opportunity to get to know their erstwhile *Kommandeur*, for on 7 September

Oberst Lehwess-Litzmann's machine crashed shortly after taking off from Sechinskaya. Ending up in Russian captivity, he too was apparently 'turned', for he also joined the Soviet-sponsored 'National Committee of Free Germany' and was later an important figure in the development of military and civil aviation in post-war East Germany.

Lehwess-Litzmann's aircraft was just one of a number of Sechinskaya-based machines lost in recent weeks. Most had simply been listed as 'failed to return', but when several were seen inexplicably to explode in mid-air, an investigation was carried out. It was discovered that Soviet partisans had infiltrated the ranks of the many Russian civilian volunteers performing menial duties about the airfield and had been attaching explosive charges, fitted with barometric pressure switches, to the Ju 88s' rear fuselage fuel tanks during the hours of darkness prior to missions.

The *Stab* and I./KG 3 were withdrawn to Terespol, in Poland, later in September to begin training for their new strategic role (the only Ju 88-equipped *Kampfgeschwader* so to do). For the next two months there were thus just four Ju 88 *Staffeln* in action on the central sector – the A-4 bombers of 4. and 5./KG 3 and the C-6 heavy fighters of 6.(Eis)/KG 3 and 9.(Eis)/KG 1. When, in the closing weeks of 1943, the former pair was also ordered back to Terespol, it heralded the end of the Ju 88 bomber on the Russian front.

After spending the first quarter of 1944 in Poland under the *Auffrischungsstab Ost* (literally 'Regeneration Staff East', the command charged with creating the eastern front's new strategic bomber force), some elements of KG 3 did reappear briefly on IV. *Fliegerkorps'* order of battle towards the end of April. Despite this seeming return to operations, however, Major Fritz Auffhammer's *Geschwaderstab* and II./KG 3 were still at Terespol, while I. *Gruppe* had simply been moved to nearby Byala Podlaska. The following month these units were all transferred to Baranowicze, in eastern Poland. But it is doubtful whether they were able to conduct any of the strategic missions they had been training for. All indications are that they were instead employed for the next two weeks in support of the retreating ground troops, before being returned to the Reich early in June. Here, III./KG 3 was re-equipped and redesignated to become I./KG 53, and the rest of the *Geschwader* was disbanded.

An even more unlikely Ju 88 presence on the eastern front during April and May 1944 was that of 4./KG 26, whose dozen or so Ju 88A-17 torpedo-bombers had been ordered down from northern Germany to Focsani and Zilistea, in Rumania. The evacuation of

The Ju 88C-6 heavy fighters of 6.(Eis)/KG 3 were particularly active along the southern flank of the Kursk 'bulge'

German forces now cut off on the Crimea was currently underway and the mission of Hauptmann Rudi Schmidt's *Staffel* was 'constantly to monitor the sea areas between the Caucasus and the Crimea, and along Rumania's Black Sea coast, and to engage Soviet warships in these areas'.

Despite complying with these orders to the letter by keeping four aircraft in the air at all times, the *Staffel* was unable to claim any successes. Not a single enemy warship was sighted in the prescribed areas, and although there was a lot of Soviet merchant shipping off the coast of the Caucasus, Schmidt's pilots were forbidden to attack these targets due to the severe shortage of torpedoes. They had to content themselves with escorting their own transports during the final stages of the Crimean evacuation until their recall to the German Baltic coast in mid-May.

With the exception of 4./KG 26's short foray down to the Black Sea, and KG 3's equally brief return to frontline service in Poland, the only Ju 88 'bombers' operational on the eastern front in 1944 were not, in fact, bombers at all, but a single *Staffel* of Ju 88C-6 heavy fighters.

In January 1944 the two train-busting *Staffeln* on the central sector, 9.(Eis)/KG 1 and 6.(Eis)/KG 3, had been amalgamated to form 14.(Eis)/KG 3. If the intention behind this move was to create a powerful railway interdiction strike force, it fell far short of expectations. During its ten-month existence the combined *Staffel's* serviceable strength rarely, if ever, reached double figures. It was normally around seven, but at times dropped as low as four. Given these totals it is clear that 14.(Eis)/KG 3 could do little to influence the course of events in the east. Although the crews, hunting singly or in pairs, continued to fly missions 'to the extreme limit of their ranges' deep into the enemy's hinterland, and continued to exact a steady toll of Soviet locomotives and rolling stock, the successes they achieved were purely local and much too limited to bring about any lasting disruption to the Russian rail supply network.

As the ground forces on the central sector retreated in the face of ever growing enemy pressure, so too did 14.(Eis)/KG 3. Based at Orsha, west of Smolensk, at the beginning of the year, it retired to Bobruisk in late March. The *Staffel* remained here until the Red Army's great summer offensive of 1944, unleashed on 22 June, drove them back across the width of Poland. Its 14 machines, exactly half of which were serviceable, last appeared on *Luftflotte* 6's order of battle based at Graudenz on 15 October.

PIGGYBACK POSTSCRIPT

The operational history of the Ju 88 bomber units on the eastern front had thus lasted precisely one week short of 40 months. During that time the impressive force of Ju 88s gathered for the launch of *Barbarossa* – 18 *Kampfgruppen* in all, totalling 463 serviceable aircraft – had, as described above, dwindled to a single *Staffel* of just seven serviceable machines.

That was not quite the end of the story. In the chaotic closing weeks of the air war in the east the Ju 88 suddenly reappeared over the front. However, it was a very different kind of Ju 88 – unmanned, packed with explosives and with an ungainly trestle arrangement on its back, atop which was perched a single-engined fighter.

This strange contraption went under several names, including *'Huckepack'* ('Piggyback'), *'Vater und Sohn'* ('Father and Son') and *'Beethoven'*, but it was officially and most commonly referred to as the

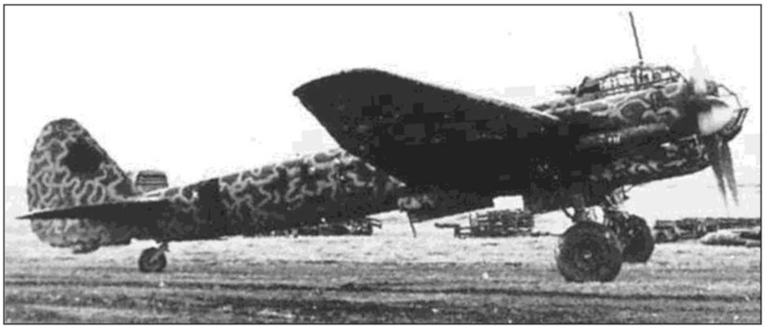
'Mistel' ('Mistletoe') device. The composite aircraft concept was not new. Experiments along similar lines had been carried out in the 1930s in an effort to increase the ranges of passenger and mail aeroplanes, but it took the Luftwaffe to turn it into a weapon of war.

The first *Mistel* combination had been delivered to training *Staffel* 2./KG 101 in May 1944. A number of ambitious schemes had initially been proposed for the strategic employment of the weapon. Among the targets considered was the Royal Navy's anchorage at Scapa Flow, in the Orkneys, Gibraltar, Leningrad and several important power plants and industrial complexes deep inside the Soviet Union. Before any of these could be properly implemented, however, the realities of war intervened. On 1 February 1945 Russian tanks reached the River Oder, northwest of Küstrin, and less than 45 miles from Berlin. Within days the Red Army was massing its forces along the eastern bank of the river in preparation for the final assault on the German capital. There were more than 130 road and rail bridges across the Oder in front of the Berlin sector, and retreating German troops had managed to demolish just 12 of them.

In a desperate attempt to stave off the impending Soviet assault on his capital for as long as possible, Hitler ordered that every means available was to be used to destroy the remaining Oder bridges. The officer first charged with this daunting responsibility was Werner Baumbach – the same Werner Baumbach who had imparted his anti-shipping expertise to KG 51 in the Crimea three years earlier. The *Führer's* order of 1 March 1945 was a model of brevity. 'I authorise Oberstleutnant Baumbach, *Kommodore* of *Kampfgeschwader* 200, to combat all enemy crossings of the Oder and Neisse rivers'.

That same day Göring also appointed Baumbach to the post of *Fliegerführer* 200. This multiplicity of tasks – *Geschwaderkommodore*, then *Bevollmächtigter* (Supreme Commander) of Oder bridge operations and now *Fliegerführer* – was too much for one man to handle. Baumbach needed a deputy to oversee air operations against the river crossing points. This task landed in the lap of ex-Mediterranean Ju 88 bomber ace Oberst Joachim 'Jochen' Helbig, who currently commanded three of the last Junkers *Kampfgruppen* still active in the west – I. and II./LG 1 and II./KG 26. To these were now added the *Mistel*-equipped II./KG 200, plus a miscellany of other *Luftflotte* 6 units, the latter being attached on a temporary basis according to the day's operational requirements. This *ad hoc* force was to be known as the *Gefechtsverband* Helbig.

After a short spell of bad weather the first *Mistel* attack was made on 8 March 1945. It was carried out against two of the bridges spanning the Oder at Göritz, south of Küstrin, by four *Misteln* of the Burg-based II./KG 200. They were accompanied by five Ju 188s and a pair of Ju 88s, whose job was to suppress the bridges' anti-aircraft defences. Although hits were claimed on both structures, with 'wreckage visible in the water', neither was completely destroyed and the



This otherwise anonymous, scribble-camouflaged, Ju 88A-4 – all national markings (and yellow fuselage band?) blacked out for night operations – carries the fuselage code letters 'EH', repeated in small white characters on the exhaust flame damper shroud. Pictured in the winter of 1944/45, it is purportedly a machine of I./LG 1, which was one of the *Gruppen* that took part in the attacks on the Oder bridges during the closing weeks of the war

I./KG 66 employed examples of the improved Ju 88S variant – similar to the S-3 of an unidentified unit seen here late in 1944 – for pathfinding duties during many of the Oder bridge operations

Soviet build-up in front of Berlin suffered minimal disruption.

Over the course of the next three weeks numerous small-scale attacks were mounted against the Oder bridges by the various units assigned to Helbig's command. A wide variety of aircraft were employed in these missions, from single-engined fighters to Do 217s armed with Hs 293 guided bombs. During the night of 22 March eight Ju 88s of II./LG 1 attacked the bridges at Göritz and Neu-Rathstock, but they inflicted only superficial damage. It would be 31 March before the next *Mistel* mission. The target on this occasion was the railway bridge at Steinau, but only one of the six participating II./KG 200 *Misteln* was credited with a hit.

Early in April a second *Mistel* unit was placed under Helbig's control. In November 1944 KG 30, veteran of the Arctic convoy battles, had been redesignated as KG(J) 30. The 'J' indicated the *Geschwader's* intended conversion to a fighter unit. However a number of its pilots were selected to undergo special *Mistel* training at Prague-Ruzyn in preparation for one of the planned deep-penetration raids into the Russian Urals. The situation at the front put paid to this scheme, however, and the KG(J) 30 *Misteln* were now to be employed instead in an attack on targets in Poland to the rear of the Red Army massed along the Oder.

Scheduled for the night of 7/8 April, this complex operation was to be carried out by no fewer than 24 *Misteln*, equally divided between four airfields and supported both by the pathfinding Ju 88s of I./KG 66 and a force of He 111 'illuminators'. Operation *Weichselbrücken* (Vistula Bridges) was to be dogged by misfortune from the very start. On the afternoon of 7 April more than 100 B-17s of the USAAF's Eighth Air Force bombed Parchim airfield. The Americans were after the field's resident Me 262s, but the damage they caused had an added bonus – it prevented the six *Misteln* based there from taking off to attack the bridge over the River Vistula at Thorn (Torun).

Then, at two of the other bases, Oranienburg and Peenemünde, the leading *Misteln* were involved in take-off accidents, which blocked the runways and kept both the Deblin and Tarnow contingents firmly on the ground. Only at Rechlin did five of the six *Misteln* targeting Warsaw succeed in lifting off. One of these reportedly fell victim to a nightfighter *en route* to the objective, and three of the other pilots were forced by mechanical malfunctions to take to their parachutes. Just one pilot, a young oberfähnrich, managed to get through to the target area. He aimed the explosive-laden Junkers beneath his fighter at one of Warsaw's bridges – and missed.

Meanwhile, the Ju 88s of II./LG 1 were still trying to knock out the Oder crossings. On the night of 7 April 12 aircraft had attacked the bridges at Neu-Rathstock and Lebus-Northeast. The following night 13 machines targeted the spans at Göritz-North and Göritz-Central. The night after that they returned to Göritz-North and Göritz-South. The sum total of all their efforts was slight damage to several of the bridges and their approaches.

The next day, 10 April, the Eighth Air Force again struck at German airfields 'known or suspected of being used by jet enemy aircraft' and again they unwittingly dealt the *Mistel* force a heavy blow. The raid by 100+ B-24s on Rechlin-Lärz destroyed 18 *Mistel* composites on the ground. It is uncertain, however, to which exact unit these belonged as their loss was simply listed under *Fliegerführer* 200's combined casualty returns. 48 hours later a small formation of four *Misteln*, led by a Ju 88 pathfinder of I./KG 66, took off from Peenemünde to attack the railway bridge across the Oder at Küstrin. The results could not be observed, but all indications were that the mission had been unsuccessful.

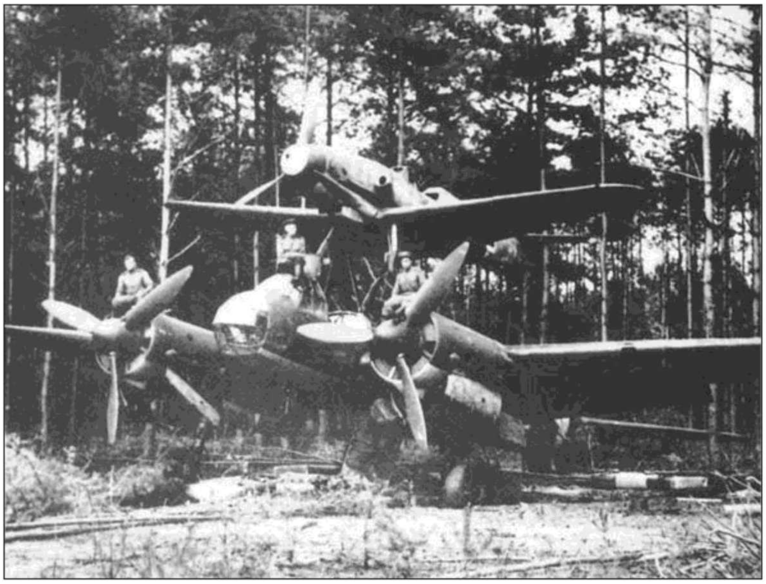
It was on this same 12 April that the *Gefechtsverband* Helbig was withdrawn from the control of *Luftflotte* 6 and subordinated to the newly established (and extremely short-lived) *Luftwaffenkommando Nordost*. On paper this meant that Helbig's declining forces were now also responsible for destroying the bridges over the River Elbe and the Upper Danube as well. Such administrative niceties weighed little in the face of events on the ground, for on 16 April eight Soviet armies had stormed across the River Oder to begin the final assault on Berlin.

KG(J) 30 was to fly just two more missions in their attempts to delay the Red Army's advance. On 26 April seven *Misteln*, accompanied by a trio of Ju 188s, lifted off from Peenemünde to attack the six bridges still spanning the Oder at Küstrin. No hits were achieved and only two of the *Mistel* pilots made it back.

Then, on 30 April – the day Hauptmann Karl Peter's II./LG 1 was disbanded – the *Misteln* took to the air for the last time. Their objective was the Oder bridge at Tantow, south of Stettin. By the time they approached it, the tiny force of four composites had been reduced to three. With the target little more than six miles dead ahead, but hidden beneath a layer of low cloud, the leader of the group, Leutnant Dittmann, gave the signal to separate. Each pilot was to attack individually. Enemy anti-aircraft fire was ferocious. The lower component of Oberfeldwebel Braun's *Mistel* was soon a mass of flames, but he managed to release it and succeeded in returning to base. So too did Leutnant Dittmann, who reported on landing 'a column of smoke rising above the river'. The third pilot, Unteroffizier Seitz, disappeared without trace.

Eight days later the war in Europe was over.

A *Mistel* captured intact at war's end by the Red Army somewhere in eastern Germany. This particular composite is the S 1 version, which combined a Bf 109 fighter with a standard Ju 88A-4 bomber. Other variants (S 2, S 3, etc.) utilised an Fw 190 fighter as the upper component, coupled to a Ju 88G nightfighter below. Some Ju 88s – both A- and G-models – had hollow-charge warheads fitted in place of the normal crew cabin (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 17*, page 82)



APPENDICES

REPRESENTATIVE Ju 88 BOMBER STRENGTHS ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT 1941-44

A) 22 JUNE 1941 *BARBAROSSA*

***Luftflotte* 1** (Northern Sector)		**Base**	**Est-Serv**
II./KG 1	Hptm Otto Stams	Powunden	29-27
III./KG 1	Maj Walter Lehwess-Litzmann	Eichwalde	30-29
Stab KG 76	Oberst *Dr. Ing.* Ernst Bormann	Gerdauen	1-0
I./KG 76	Hptm von Sichart	Gerdauen	30-22
II./KG 76	Hptm Volprecht *Freiherr* Riedesel zu Eisenbach	Jürgenfelde	30-25
III./KG 76	Maj Franz von Benda	Schippenbeil	29-22
Stab/KG 77	Oberst Johann Raithel	Heiligenbeil	1-1
I./KG 77	(Hptm Joachim Poetter)	Jesau	30-23
II./KG 77	Hptm Dietrich Peltz	Wormditt	31-23
III./KG 77	Maj von Frankenberg	Heiligenbeil	29-20
KGr 806	Maj Hans Emig	Prowehren	30-18
***Luftflotte* 2** (Central Sector)			
Stab KG 3	Oberst Wolfgang von Chamier-Glisczinski	(Deblin)	2-2
I./KG 3	Maj Heinze	(Deblin)	41-32
II./KG 3	Hptm Kurd Peters	(Deblin)	38-32
***Luftflotte* 4** (Southern Sector)			
Stab KG 51	Maj Hans Bruno Schulz-Heyn	Krosno	2-2
I./KG 51	Hptm Heinrich Hahn	Krosno	22-22
II./KG 51	Hptm Max Stadelmeier	Krosno	36-29
III./KG 51	Maj Walter Marienfeld	Lezany	32-28
Stab KG 54	Obstlt Otto Höhne	Swidnik	1-1
I./KG 54	Hptm Richard Linke	Swidnik	34-31
II./KG 54	Maj Erhart Krafft von Dellmensingen	Swidnik	36-33
***Luftflotte* 5** (Arctic Front)			
I./KG 30	Maj Horst von Riesen	Banak	34-19
II./KG 30	Hptm Eberhard Roeger	Banak	31-22
Totals			**579-463**

B) 28 JUNE 1942 *BLAU*

***Luftflotte* 1** (Northern Sector)		**Base**	**Est-Serv**
II./KG 1	Maj Herbert Lorch	Dno	29-17
III./KG 1	Maj Hans Keppler	Dno	26-19
Luftwaffenkommando Ost (Central Sector)			
Stab KG 3	Oberst Heinich Conrady	Bryansk	2-1
I./KG 3	(Maj Günther Dörffel)	Rzhev	36-18
II./KG 3	Hptm Peter-Paul Breu	Bryansk	27-16
III./KG 3	(Maj Erich Rathmann)	(Bryansk)	29-20

Luftflotte 4 (Southern Sector)		**Base**	**Est-Serv**
Stab KG 51	Oberst Paul Koester	Zaporozhe	2-2
I./KG 54	Maj Hans-Joachim Ritter	Kharkov-West	32-26
II./KG 51	Hptm Rudolf Henne	Zaporozhe	33-19
III./KG 51	Maj Ernst *Freiherr* von Bibra	Kharkov-West	33-24
II./KG 54	Hptm Otto Köhnke	Kharkov	28-16
Stab KG 76	Oberst *Dr-Ing* Erst Bormann	Sarabuz	3-2
II./KG 76	Hptm Volprecht *Freiherr* Riedesel zu Eisenbach	Sarabuz	32-20
III./KG 76	?	Sarabuz	33-15
III./LG 1	Hptm Hermann Hogeback	(Crimea)	26-11
***Luftflotte* 5** (Arctic Front)			
I./KG 30	Hptm Konrad Kahl	Banak	36-28
II./KG 30	Hptm Erich Stoffregen	Banak	32-26
III./KG 30	Hptm Hajo Herrmann	Banak	36-32
Totals			**475-312**

C) 5 JULY 1943 *ZITADELLE*

***Luftflotte* 6** (Central Sector)		**Base**	**Est-Serv**
III./KG 1	Hptm Werner Kanther	Orel-West	29-17
Stab KG 51	Maj Hanns Heise	Bryansk	2-1
II./KG 51	Maj Herbert Voss	Bryansk	41-27
III./KG 51	Hptm Wilhelm Rath	Bryansk	22-15
***Luftflotte* 4** (Southern Sector)			
Stab KG 3	Oberst Walter Lehwess-Litzmann	Poltava	1-1
I./KG 3	(Hptm Heinz Laube)	Poltava	35-1
II./KG 3	(Hptm Fritz Rahe)	Poltava	37-27
***Luftflotte* 5** (Arctic Front)			
I./KG 30		?	
Banak		34-30	
Totals			**201-137**

D) 15 OCTOBER 1944

***Luftflotte* 6** (Central Sector)		**Base**	**Est-Serv**
14.(Eis)/KG 3	?	Graudenz	14-7
Totals			**14-7**

NOTE

Details in (brackets) are uncorroborated

COLOUR PLATES

1

Ju 88A-5 'V4+KS' of 8./KG 1, Eichwalde, East Prussia, June 1941

With all traces of the temporary black camouflage paint that had adorned its undersides during recent night operations over Great Britain now removed, and resplendent in freshly applied yellow eastern front markings, 8. *Staffel's* 'KS' is typical of the unit's machines during the opening rounds of *Barbarossa*. This may well be the 'V4+KS' (Wk-Nr. 8193) that was reported missing in action over the Lake Ilmen area on 16 July 1941, the aircraft having possibly fallen victim to a Soviet fighter.

2

Ju 88A-4 'V4+FR' of 7./KG 1, Pleskau-South, Northern Sector, May 1942

III./KG 1 was one of the later eastern front Ju 88 *Kampfgruppen* to convert from the A-5 to the improved A-4 variant, not being pulled out of the line for re-equipment until some ten months into the campaign. The *Gruppe's* new mounts did not remain pristine for long, however, as witness the copious amounts of spring mud already caking the rear fuselage of 7./KG 1's 'FR'. Note also the *Staffel's* unique, and subtle, identifying mark – a small white diamond centred at the top of the rudder hinge line.

3

Ju 88C-6 'V4+DT' of 9.(Eis)/KG 1, Dno, Northern Sector, February 1943

Looking, if anything, even grubbier and altogether more 'war weary' than the aircraft in the previous profile, 9. *Staffel's* hastily winter-camouflaged, train-busting C-6 displays all the evidence of its hard use against the extensive Soviet railway network south of Leningrad during the winter of 1942/43.

4

Ju 88A-4 '5K+BN' of 5./KG 3, Minsk, Central Sector, August 1941

One of the aircraft presumably involved in the night raids on Moscow during the late summer/early autumn of 1941, this machine has had liberal quantities of temporary black paint daubed on its undersides as well as over all national markings and unit codes – even the red spinner tip has been crudely obliterated. The only distinguishing marks it now carries are the miniscule 'last two' on the rear fuselage and a slightly larger individual letter 'B' at the base of the tailfin.

5

Ju 88A-4 '5K+HH' of 1./KG 3, Rzhev, Central Sector, summer 1942

Although unusual, the practice of fully outlining a bomber's fuselage code markings thinly in white – as depicted here on 1./KG 3's 'HH' – was not unique (indeed, some Do 17Zs of KG 77 had earlier displayed their codes in a similar manner). What is not known, however, is whether this practice was repeated at unit level, or whether such cases were quite simply the result of an individual groundcrew with clearly too much time on its hands!

6

Ju 88A-4 '5K+EK' of 2./KG 3, Kharkov-West, Southern Sector, January 1943

No need for fancy white outlining on this immaculately winter camouflaged A-4 of 2. *Staffel*. Such cleanliness in the depths of a Russian winter would seem to suggest that this is either a newly arrived replacement machine, or an aircraft that has been freshly repainted during a recent major overhaul.

7

Ju 88C-6 '5K+IP' of 6.(Eis)/KG 3, Poltava, Southern Sector, July 1943

A heavy-fighter 'train-buster' of 6. (Eisenbahn) *Staffel* shown in standard finish and markings as worn during Operation *Zitadelle*. This unit would later (January 1944) incorporate the C-6s of 9.(Eis)/KG 1 into its ranks to form 14.(Eis)/KG 3, which in turn became the very last Ju 88 'bomber' unit to remain operational over Russia in the summer of 1944.

8

Ju 88A-17 '1H+BH' of 1./KG 26, Bardufoss, northern Norway, December 1944

Wearing a tight meander or 'scribble' pattern camouflage on both upper and lower surfaces, this A-17 torpedo-bomber of 1./KG 26 is suitably attired for its part in the closing rounds of the long running campaign against the Allies' Russian convoys. Note the simplified (outline only) national markings and the reduced size of the *Geschwader* code '1H'.

9

Ju 88A-5 '4D+FP' of 6./KG 30, Banak, northern Norway, June 1941

The first Ju 88 *Kampfgruppe* to operate against Soviet forces in the Arctic theatre was II./KG 30. Initially, the only visible sign of the unit's move from the western side of *Luftflotte* 5's area of command to the eastern was the narrow yellow band encircling each machine's rear fuselage, as seen here on 6. *Staffel's* 'FP'. Note the glare shield on the windscreen-mounted MG 81 machine gun and the exhaust shroud – both indicative of recent night operations – plus the additional 20 mm cannon projecting through the nose glazing.

10

Ju 88A-4 '4D+CN' of 5./KG 30, Banak, northern Norway, April 1942

By the spring of 1942, with the Luftwaffe's battle against the Arctic convoys fully joined, the original thin yellow band as worn by the A-5 in the previous profile had been replaced on II./KG 30's brand new A-4s (the unit had re-equipped late in 1941) by a full set of regulation eastern front markings.

11

Ju 88A-4 '9K+HR' of 7./KG 51, Balti, Rumania, September 1941

After nearly six weeks spent re-equipping at Wiener Neustadt, III./KG 51 took their factory fresh A-4s to Balti, in Rumania, in late August 1941 to commence operations along the southernmost flank of the Russian front. Note that unlike II./KG 30 above, which displayed its *Gruppe* identifying colour (red) on the tips of its spinners, III./KG 51 chose to sport its yellow III. *Gruppe* identifier in the form of a thin stripe around the front of its engine nacelles.

12

Ju 88C-6 '9K+MR' of 7.(Eis)/KG 51, Bagerovo, Crimea, spring 1943

Early in 1943 7./KG 51 was selected to become the *Geschwader's* 'train-busting' *Staffel*. Converted to C-6 cannon-armed heavy fighters and redesignated 7.(Eis)/KG 51, some of the unit's first missions were flown against the Soviet rail supply network deep in the Caucasus. Note the attempt to disguise the *Staffel's* new role by painting 'bomber'-style glazing on the machine's solid nose (and compare this somewhat crude effort with the much more professional paint job applied by groundcrews to the aircraft of 4.(Eis)/KG 76 illustrated on page 79).

13

Ju 88A-4 '9K+BP' of 6./KG 51, Zhitomir, Southern Sector, September 1943

Some of II./KG 51's machines were also cannon-armed, being fitted with a single 20 mm MG FF cannon in the ventral gondola. Primarily intended for anti-shipping operations, this powerful weapon was also used to good effect by Ju 88 crews against the enemy's armoured and soft-skinned vehicles. Note the recent overpainting of the hitherto standard scale *Geschwader* code ('9K') and its replacement by one of much smaller (officially one-fifth) size.

14

Ju 88A-5 'B3+AH' of 1./KG 54, Swidnik, Poland, June 1941

It has been suggested that the diagonal fuselage stripe seen on some KG 54 machines during the opening phases of *Barbarossa* (and earlier in the Battles of France and Britain) were used to identify unit or formation leaders. Whether true or not, the stripe on the aircraft depicted here certainly attracted the attention of one Soviet fighter pilot over Cherkassy on 23 July 1941, for he promptly rammed the bomber! Despite a mangled port wing, the pilot of 'AH' managed to pull off an emergency landing.

15

Ju 88A-4 'B3+CC' of *Stab* II./KG 54, Orsha-South, Central Sector, February 1942

Withdrawn from Russia back to the Reich late in 1941, and from there fully expecting to follow I./KG 54 down to the Mediterranean, the crews and aircraft of II./KG 54 were instead subjected to a crash programme of 'winterisation' before being rushed back to the eastern front in mid-January 1942. After some four weeks of intensive frontline operations against Soviet road and rail networks, 'CC's' new coat of white paint is already showing distinct signs of wear and tear.

16

Ju 88S-3 '(Z6)+EL' of 3./KG 66, Tutow-South/ Mecklenburg, Germany, spring 1945

Tasked not only with pathfinding duties for *Mistel* operations against the Oder bridges during the closing weeks of the war, but also with other, longer range missions of their own, some of I./KG 66's machines were equipped to carry no fewer than four underwing fuel tanks – two under the centre-sections and two outboard of the engines. Note the low-key 'scribble' camouflage overall and the simplified markings which consisted of outline-only national insignia and the 'last two' of the fuselage code now displayed much reduced in size alongside the tailfin swastika.

17

Ju 88A-5 'F1+PR' of 7./KG 76, Schippenbeil, East Prussia, June 1941

From the very end of the Russian campaign with the previous profile back to the very beginning with this one. The A-5 of 7./KG 76 depicted here carries a textbook set of markings as laid down by regulations for the launch of *Barbarossa*. Note also the thin vertical band around the fuselage aft of the wing root. This appeared on a number of KG 76's machines (including its earlier Do 17Zs), and presumably served a similar purpose to the diagonal stripes sported by aircraft of KG 54 (see profile 14).

18

Ju 88A-4 'F1+GT' of 9./KG 76, Smolensk, Central Sector, December 1941

Suitably garbed in a fresh coat of white camouflage paint, 9. *Staffel's* 'GT' was part of the KG 76 force that supported Army Group Centre's defensive battles in front of Moscow during the harsh winter of 1941/42. It was to be the *Geschwader's* first and last taste of a hellish Russian winter – 11 months hence the unit would be *en route* to the sunnier climes of the Mediterranean.

19

Ju 88A-5 '3Z+AH' of 1./KG 77, Heiligenbeil, East Prussia, June 1941

Another of the units gathered in East Prussia for the start of the Russian campaign in June 1941 was KG 77. Its aircraft wore the standard finish and markings of the period, the only touch of individuality being the positioning of the yellow fuselage band, which was centred on – and almost obscured by – the *Balkenkreuz* as shown here on 1. *Staffel's* 'AH'.

20

Ju 88A-4 '3Z+CL' of 3./KG 77, Orsha, Central Sector, February 1942

By late 1941 all three *Gruppen* of KG 77 had been returned to the Reich for re-equipment with the A-4 prior to being transferred to the Mediterranean theatre. In the event, I. *Gruppe's* flight south was to be delayed. Like II./KG 54 (see profile 15), it was instead sent back to the eastern front (central sector) early in 1942, where it would remain until July of that year.

21

Ju 88A-5 'S4+RH' of 1./KGr 506, Malmi, Finland, autumn 1941

Originating from a pre-war maritime unit (*Küstenfliegergruppe* 506), KGr 506 re-equipped with Ju 88 bombers in the late summer of 1941. It then saw service on the northern sector of the Russian front – based both in the Baltic States and in Finland – before being redesignated as III./KG 26 the following year. During their time in the east some of the *Gruppe's* machines, including 'S4+RH' seen here, appear to have bucked regulations by wearing their yellow theatre band *ahead* of the fuselage cross.

22

Ju 88A-5 'M7+HK' of 2./KGr 806, Prowehren, East Prussia, June 1941

Although also ostensibly formed as a maritime unit (*KüFlGr* 806) in the early months of the war, KGr 806 was equipped with bombers (He 111s) from the outset. It then converted to Ju 88s in time to participate in the Battle of Britain. During the opening rounds of *Barbarossa* it too operated over the Baltic Sea area, being based variously in East Prussia, Finland and the Baltic States, before transfer to the Mediterranean and redesignation as III./KG 54 in 1942. Note that 'HK' has found yet another location for the Russian front's yellow fuselage band.

23

Ju 88A-4 '(L1)+NP' of 6./LG 1, Pretzsch/Saxony, Germany, spring 1945

No yellow theatre band or *Geschwader* code on this anonymous machine, just low-visibility finish and markings, together with black undersides and exhaust flame dampers – all signs of nocturnal use. In fact, although since overshadowed by the numerous *Mistel* sorties being flown at the same time, II./LG 1's attacks on the Oder bridges in the spring of 1945 were among the last true Ju 88 bomber operations of the war against the Soviet Union.

24

Ju 88D-1 'G2+DH' of 1.(F)/124, Kirkenes, northern Norway, July 1942

Regrettably, a lack of space has prevented much mention being made in the main text of the Ju 88 reconnaissance *Staffeln* on the Russian front. However, these units played an important – at times vital – part in the air war in the east, and none more so than those stationed in northern Norway and Finland during the historic Arctic Convoy battles. The resident long-range reconnaissance *Staffel* in this area throughout the entire period from 1941 to 1945 was 1.(F)/124, whose 'DH' is depicted here.

25

Ju 88D-1 'F6+FN' of 4.(F)/122, Taganrog, Southern Sector, February 1943

Like their bomber counterparts, the reconnaissance Ju 88s were also given a coat of temporary white camouflage paint during the winter months. 'FN's' finish is looking decidedly the worse for wear, which is an indication, perhaps, of the many hours flying time the *Staffel* was putting in monitoring the movements of the Red Army in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Stalingrad.

26

Ju 88D 'K7+MK' of *Nachtaufklärungsstaffel* 2, Gomel, Central Sector, October 1943

Just prior to *Barbarossa*, each of the three main eastern front sectors was assigned a Do 17-equipped long-range night reconnaissance *Staffel* – Nos 1, 2 and 3 operating on the southern, central and northern sectors, respectively, with a fourth being added in August 1942 for service under the then newly established *Lw.Kdo.Don*. During the course of the war against the Soviet Union these nocturnal *Staffeln* were equipped with a miscellany of types, including the Ju 88 of *Nacht Aufkl.St.* 2 shown here.

27

Ju 88D '5Z+GA' of *Wekusta* 76, Debrecen, Hungary, August 1944

A similar system to that above ensured that each of the eastern front sectors also had its own meteorological *Staffel*, or *Wekusta* (*Wettererkuundungsstaffel* or Weather Observation Squadron). The situation regarding these units was made slightly more complex, however, by the inclusion of the Arctic front, by transfers to other theatres and by the temporary splitting of some *Staffeln* into two. In all, there were thus at least eight *Wekustas* serving in the east at one time or another. *Wekusta* 76, whose 'GA' is seen here, operated on the southern sector from 1941 until the end of 1944.

28

Ju 88A-4 'B1+47' of the *Ung.K.St.*, Zamosc, Poland, spring 1944

Brief mention should perhaps also be made here of the other Axis air forces that flew the Ju 88 on the eastern front. Hungary reportedly received 111 examples of the type – some 83 bombers (including a small number of C-6 heavy fighters) and 28 reconnaissance models. Although the machine depicted here is listed on *Luftflotte* 4's orders of battle simply as belonging to the *Ungarische Kampfstaffel* (Hungarian Bomber Squadron), its actual unit is believed to have been the Hungarian air force's 102/1 *Bombázószázad* (102/1 Bomber Squadron).

29

Ju 88A-4 '127a' of *Grupul 5 bombardament*, Tecuci, Rumania, June 1944

Rumania was the second largest recipient of Ju 88s, taking delivery of 80+ bombers and 20 reconnaissance machines. *Grupul 5* formed part of the mixed-force *Corpul 1 Aerian Român*, which was subordinated *en bloc* to *Luftflotte* 4 and referred to in Luftwaffe records as the *Rum. I. Fliegerkorps* (with *Grupul 5 bombardament's* Germanic designation being *Rum.V. Kgr.).* Note the overpainted Luftwaffe markings and the 'a' suffix to the aircraft's individual number, the latter indicating that this was a replacement machine for an earlier '127' that had been either lost in combat or written off.

30

Ju 88A-4 JK-260/'4' of PLeLv 44, Onttola, Finland, June 1944

The third country to use the Ju 88 bomber against the Soviet Union was Finland, which purchased 24 A-4s from Germany in the spring of 1943. Originally delivered in standard Luftwaffe colours, a number of these machines were subsequently repainted in Finnish camouflage as seen here (the light blue-grey numeral on the fin indicating that this is aircraft No 4 of PLeLv (Bomber Squadron) 44's third flight). Unlike many of the Hungarian and Rumanian units (above), Finnish squadrons were not integrated into the Luftwaffe's command structure, but remained separate entities under the direct control of their own air force.

INDEX

References to illustrations are shown in **bold**. Plates are prefixed pl, and their corresponding captions can be found on the page in brackets.

Abkhaziya (Soviet transport) 73
Alamar (US freighter) 38
Aldersdale, RFA (fleet oiler) 41
Angerstein, Oberst Karl 8, 21, 63
Antonescu, General Ion 7
Ark Royal, HMS (aircraft carrier) 47
armoured train **cover**, **76**
Atis Kronvaldis (Latvian transport) 24
Auffhammer, Major Fritz 85
Avenger, HMS (escort carrier ex-*Rio Hudson*) 43, **44**, 44

Ballasco, Oberleutnant Otto von 63
Baumbach, Major Werner 20, 31, **46**, 70, 87
Bditelny (Soviet destroyer) 75
Bender, Oberfeldwebel Wilhelm **31**, 31–2
Berger, Oberleutnant Alfons 'Ali' **80**, 80
Bernhardt, Obergefreiter 26
Bibra, Major Ernst *Freiherr* von 70, 77, 81
Bloedorn, Major Erich 36, 40, **42**
Bolton Castle (British freighter) 41
bombs: 50 kg 13, **14**; 250 kg 13, **21**, **22**; 1000kg *Luftmine 'B'* 19; 1800 kg 'Satan' 14; BM 1000 19, 66; SC 1000 **22**, **73**; SD 2 'Butterfly' 81; SD 10 fragmentation 13, 81
Bormann, Oberst *Dr.Ing.* Ernst 8, 32, 61, 65, 77, 78
Brandenburg, Oberleutnant Johannes 62
Braun, Oberfeldwebel 89
Bukowski, Unteroffizier Willi 18

Campania, HMS (escort carrier) 48
Cape Palliser (British A/S trawler) 37
Carlton (US freighter) 38
Chamier-Glisczinski, Oberst Wolfgang von **31**, 32
City of Joliet (US freighter) 38
Conrady, Oberst Heinrich 68, 79, 82
convoys: JW 52 46; JW 53 46; JW 54 46; JW 64 47–8; PQ 12 36; PQ 13 36, 37, 38, 39; PQ 14 36; PQ 15 37; PQ 16 37–9; PQ 17 39–42, 43, 44, 45, 46; PQ 18 43–5, **45**; QP 10 37; RA 53 46; RA 62 47; RA 64 48
Cordes, Leutnant Udo **67**

D 5 (Soviet submarine) **71**
Daniel Morgan (US freighter) 40
Dekabrist (Soviet freighter) 45
Dellmensingen, Major Erhart Krafft von 11, 29
Deutschbein, Leutnant Horst 67
Dierich, Major Fritzherbert 'Fritze' 78, 79
Dittmann, Leutnant 89
Donbass (Soviet tanker) 41
Dover Hill (British freighter) 46

Earlston (US freighter) 40
El Capitan (Panamanian freighter) 42
Emig, Major Hans 8, 9, 19, 31
Empire Baffin (British freighter) 38
Empire Cowper (British freighter) 37
Empire Lawrence (CAM ship) **38**, 38
Empire Purcell (British freighter) 38
Empire Ranger (British freighter) 36
Empire Starlight (British freighter) 36
Enderle, Hauptmann Emil 16

Fairfield City (US freighter) 40
Fanderl, Feldwebel Georg 69
Finnish PLeLv 44 JK-260/'4' pl**59**(95)
Flechner, Hauptmann Willi **42**, 42, 43
'Floating Anti-aircraft Battery No 3' 73–4
Frankenberg und Proschlitz, Major Egbert von 82
Freimann, Hauptmann Walter 30
Friedeburg, Major Wilhelm von 76, 78, 79

Garland (Polish destroyer) 38
Gehrke, Haptmann Heinz 66
Göring, Reichsmarschall Hermann 11–12, **21**, 47–8, 69, 79, 87
Gravenreuth, Hauptmann Sigmund-Ulrich Freiherr von 37, 66
Greim, *General der Flieger* Ritter von 13
Grundmann, Hauptmann Hans-Joachim **29**

Häberlen, Major Klaus **81**, 81
Harpalion (British freighter) 37
Heise, Hauptmann Hanns 75, 77, 83
Helbig, Oberst Joachim 'Jochen' 87, 88, 89
Henne, Hauptmann Rudolf 71
Henning, Oberfeldwebel Horst 67
Henry Bacon (US freighter) 48
Hermann, Oberleutnant Benno 74
Herrmann, Hauptmann Hajo 36, 42
Hinrichs, Oberleutnant Ernst 73–4
Hitler, Reichsführer Adolf 7, 10, 25, 60, 65, 74, 81, 83, 87
Hogeback, Hauptmann Hermann 76
Höhne, Oberstleutnant 'Onkel Otto' 8, 11, 29, 32
Hoosier (US freighter) 42

Ihrig, Leutnant Ernst-Wilhelm 9
Ivan Papanin (Soviet transport) 25

Junkers Ju 88 **8**, **11**, **12**, 35, 38, 39, **49**, **60**, **72**, **76**, **84**
Junkers Ju 88A-4 **15**, 23, **25**, **29**, 29, 30, **31**, 31, 35, **37**, **42**, 62, 85, **87**; '3Z+CL' pl**56**(94); '4D+CN' pl**53**(92-3); '5K+BN' pl**51**(92); '5K+EK' pl**51**(92); '5K+HH' pl**51**(92); '9K+BP' pl**54**(93); '9K+HR' pl**53**(93); '127a' pl**59**(95); 'B1+47' pl**59**(94); 'B3+CC' pl**54**(93); 'B3+EB' 30; 'F1+GT' pl**55**(93); JK-260/'4' pl**59**(95); '(L1)+NP' pl**57**(94); 'V4+FR' pl**50**(92)
Junkers Ju 88A-5 6, **8**, **14**, **15**, **79**; '3Z+AH' pl**56**(93); '4D+FP' pl**52**(92); 'B3+AH' pl**54**(93); 'F1+PR' pl**55**(93); 'M7+HK' pl**57**(94); 'S4+RH' pl**56**(94); 'V4+KS' pl**50**(92)
Junkers Ju 88A-6: 'B3+EC' **13**; 'M7+GH' **19**
Junkers Ju 88A-17: torpedo bombers 85, '1H+BH' pl**52**(92)

Junkers Ju 88C-6 fighters: '5K+IP' pl**52**(92); '9K+MR' pl**53**(93); **cover**, **66**, **67**, 67, 76, **77**, **79**, 81, 84, **85**, 85, 86; 'V4+DT' pl**50**(92)
Junkers Ju 88D: '5Z+GA' pl**58**(94); 'K7+MK' pl**58**(94)
Junkers Ju 88D-1 **16**; 'D7+BH' **49**; 'F6+FN' pl**58**(94); 'G2+DH' pl**57**(94); 'G2+EH' **48**
Junkers Ju 88P-1 84
Junkers Ju 88S 'Mistel' 8–9, 86–7, **88**, 88, **89**, 89; (Z6)+EL' pl**55**(93)
Junkers Ju 188 47, 48, **49**, 87

Kahl, Hauptmann Konrad **42**, 42
Kalpaks (Latvian transport) 25
Kampfgeschwader:
  KG 1 'Hindenburg' 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 24, 68, 78–84
    Gruppen: 1./KG 1 6, 43, 62, 63, 64, 65, 78, 80, 81, **87**; II./KG 1 6, 7, 9, 15, **16**,16, 21, 22, 23, 61, 62, 63, 65; III./KG 1 6, 7, 9, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 80, **82**, 83, 84; 'V4+AD' 18
    Staffeln: 1./KG 1 64; 3./KG 1; 'V4+EL' **64;** 4./KG 1 62; 5./KG 1 **17**, 62, 63; 6./KG 1 16; 'V4+MP' 16–17, 18; 7./KG 1, 'V4+FR' pl**50**(92); 8./KG 1 62; pl**50**(92); 9.(Eis)/KG 1 63, 84, 85, 86; 'V4+CT' **82**; 'V4+DT' pl**50**(92); 'V4+AA' 63
  KG 3 'Blitz' 8, 9, 14, 68
    Gruppen: I./KG 3 20, **21**, 65, 67, 68, 82, 83, 84, 85; II./KG 3 **8**, 20, 65, 66, 67, **69**, **81**, 82, 84, 85; III./KG 3 66, 85
    Staffeln: 1./KG 3, '5K+HH' pl'**51**(92); 2./KG 3, '5K+EK' pl**51**(92); 4./KG 3 85; 5./KG 3 31, **68**, 85; '5K+BN' pl**51**(92); 6.(Eis)/KG 3 **66**, 84, **85**, 85, 86; '5K+IP' pl**52**(92);9.(Eis)/KG 3 **67**; 14.(Eis)/KG 3 86
  KG 26 torpedo bombers 44, 45, 47
    Gruppen: I./KG 26 39, 47; II./KG 26 47, 47–8, 49, 87; III./KG 26 37, 38, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 64
    Staffel: 1./KG 26 '1H+BH' pl**52**(92); 4./KG 26 85, 86
  KG 30 'Adler' **8**, 8, 38–9, 39, 40–2, 44, 45; '4D+KM' 70
    Gruppen: I./KG 30 **35**, 35, 36, 42, 45, 46, **47**; II./KG 30 10, 33–5, 36, **37**, 43, 45,46, 65, 66, 67; '4D+EN' **33**; '4D+HK' **48;**III./KG 30 36, 38, 41, 45
    Staffeln: 1./KG 30 45; 2./KG 30 45; 3./KG 30 35, 45; 5./KG 30 10, 35; '4D+BN' **66**; '4D+CN' pl**53**(92-3); 6./KG 30 10, **34**, 34; '4D+CP'**42**; '4D+FP' pl**52**(92)
  KG 51 'Edelweiss' 8, 10, 12, 12–13, 25, **26**, 68, **70**, 72, 73, **74**, 76, 77, **78**
    Gruppen: I./KG 51 10, 13, 26, 27, **28**, 28, 71, 76, 77, 78, 79, **81**, 81, 82; II./KG 51 10, 13, **14**, 26, 27, 28, 76, 77, 78, 81, 82, 83, 84; III./KG 51 10–11, 13, **15**, 27, 28, 69, 69–70, **71**, 72, 76, 77, 79, 81, **82**, 82, 83, 84; '9K+DS' **73**; '9K+FR' **73**; '9K+XS' **84**
    Staffeln: 1./KG 51 32, 69, '9K+BL' **73,** **80**, 80; 2./KG 51 71, 73; 3./KG 51 26–7, **27**; 4./KG 51 26; 5./KG 51 11, 71; 6./KG 51 **29**, 79; '9K+AP' 80; '9K+BP' pl**54**(93) **71** 7.(Eis)/KG 51 71, **77**, 77, 81, 84; '9K+HR' pl**53**(93); '9K+MR' pl**53**(93); 8./KG 51 70; '9K+GS' **72;** 9./KG 51 71
  KG 54 'Totenkopf' 8, 10, 11, 12–13, 20, 28
    Gruppen: I./KG 54 11, 13, 29, 30, 32, 68; II./KG 54 11, **13**, 13, 29, **30**, **31**, 31, 65, 66, 67, 75; 'B3+CC' pl**54**(93); III./KG 54 25, 32
    Staffeln: 1./KG 54 'B3+AH' pl**54**(93); 4./KG 54 11, 13, 67; 5./KG 54 13, 32, 67; 6./KG 54 29, 30
  KG 66 pathfinders
    Gruppe: I./KG 66 **88**, 89
    Staffel: 3./KG 66 pl**55**(93)
  KG 76 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 24, 61, 66, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78
    Gruppen: 1./KG 76 61, 75; II./KG 76 67, 68, 72; III./KG 76 **21**, 68, 72, **74**, **77**
    Staffeln: 4.(Eis)/KG 76, **cover** 74, **79**; 6./KG 76 22; 7./KG 76 21, 32; 'F1+PR' pl**55**(93); 8./KG 76 **15**; 'F1+AS' **24;** 9./KG 76, 'F1+GT' pl**55**(93)
  KG 77 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, **22**, 22, 23, **24**, 24, **25**, 61
    Gruppen: I./KG 77 **24**, 61, **61**, 65, 67, 68, '3Z+AB' **22**; '3Z+DH' **65;** II./KG 77 15, **17**, 23, 32
    Staffeln: 1./KG 77 '3Z+AH' pl**56**(93); 3./KG 77 '3Z+CL' pl**56**(94)
  KG 200
    Gruppe: II/KG 200 87, 88 KG(J) 30 88, 89
  LG 1
    Gruppe III.LG 1 72, 73, 76, 77
    Gruppe II.LG 1 8–9, 87, 88, 89
    Gruppe I.LG 1 87
    Staffel, 6./LG 1 '(L1)+NP' pl**57**(94)
Kampfgruppe 506 43
  Staffeln 1./KGr 506 25; S4+RH' pl**56**(94)
Kampfgruppe 806 8, 9–10, 19, 24, 25, 31, 32
  Staffeln: 1./Kgr 806 **19**, 19; 2./KGr 806, M7+HK' pl**57**(94)
Kanther, Hauptmann Werner 80, 83
Karl Marx (Soviet destroyer) 24
Kazakhstan (Soviet transport) 25
Kentucky (US freighter) 45
Keppler, Major Hans 62, 63, 78
KG 54 'Totenkopf', *Gruppen*, III./KG 54, *Kampfgeschwader* 25, 32
Klischat, Oberleutnant Helmut 71, 76
Koester, Oberst Paul 28, 68, 69
Köhnke, Hauptmann Otto 75
Kralemann, Oberfeldwebel Friedrich **68**
Krasny Krim (Soviet cruiser) 69
Krisjanis Valdemars (Latvian icebreaker) 24
Krüger, Major Waldemar 66, 67

Lake Lucerne (Soviet transport) 24
Lau, Major Heinrich 63, 64, 80
Laube, Hauptmann Heinz 65
Lehwess-Litzmann, Major Walter 7, 18, 84, 85
Leningradsoviet (Soviet training ship) 25
Linke, Major Richard 11, 19, 25, 32
Lorch, Major Herbert 63
Lowther Castle (British freighter) 38
Luga (Soviet freighter) 10
Lukesch, Leutnant Dieter 32

Maksim Gorky (Soviet cruiser) 62
Marienfeld, Oberstleutnant Walter 10, 13, 32
Mary Luckenbach (US Liberty ship) **45**, 45
Mormacsul (US freighter) 38
Müller, Oberleutnant Horst 67

Nachtaufklärungstaffel 2, 'K7+MK' pl**58**(94)
Nacke, Stabsfeldwebel Rudolf **21**
Nairana, HMS (escort carrier) 48
New Westminster City (Canadian freighter) 36
Nikolai Ostrovsky (Soviet minelayer) **71**
Nocker, Hauptmann Klaus-Wilhelm 43

Ocean Freedom (US freighter) 46
Ocean Voice (British freighter) 38
Oktyabrskaya Revolutsiya (Soviet battleship) 22, **23**, 62, 70

Pan Atlantic (US freighter) 41
Pankraft (US freighter) 40
Parizhskaya Kommuna (Soviet battleship) 70
Paulus Potter (Dutch freighter) 41
Peltz, Hauptmann Dietrich 15, **17**, 23, 32, 70
Peter, Hauptmann Karl 89
Peter Kerr (US Liberty ship) 41
Petzold, Oberleutnant Ernst 32, 67
Pflugbeil, Generalleutnant Kurt 13, 26
Poetter, Hauptmann Joachim 67
Poppenburg, Oberleutnant Werner 77

Raceland, (Panamanian freighter) 36
Raithel, Oberst Johann 8, 23, 32
Rath, Hauptmann Wilhelm 81
reconnaissance *Staffeln*: 1.(F)/124: 'G2+DH' pl**57**(94); 'G2+EH' **48** 2.(F)/122, 'F6+AK' **20**; 4.(F)/122, 'F6+FN' pl**58**(94); 5.(F)/122 **16**
Richthofen, *General der Flieger* Wolfram *Freiherr* von 14, 65, 67, 72, 74
Riesen, Major Horst von 80
Roeger, Hauptmann Eberhard 35
Ruhno (Estonian steamer) 10
Rumanian *Grupul 5 bombardament* '127a' pl**59**(95)
Runkel, Hauptmann Peter 62

S 33 (Soviet submarine) **71**
Safonov, Boris (Soviet ace) **34**, 34, 35, **39**, 39
Saule (Latvian transport) 25
Sched, Hauptmann Josef 25
Schellern, Unteroffizier Reinhard **34**, 34
Schemmel, Oberstleutnant 63
Schmidt, Hauptmann Rudi 86
Schobert, Generaloberst Ritter von 26
Schröder, Hauptmann Eberhard 42
Schulz-Heyn, Major Hans Bruno 8, 10
Schwegler, Oberleutnant Matthias **32**, 32
Sea Hurricane fighters **38**, 38, 43, **44**, 44
Seedorf, Hauptmann Erich 19
Seitz, Unteroffizier 89
Serdity (Soviet destroyer) 19, 24
Serp-i-Molot (Soviet repair ship) 25
Seubert, Oberleutnant Günther 11, 67
Skrunda (Latvian transport) 24
Stams, Hauptmann Otto 7, 15
Stary Bolshevik (Russian freighter) 38
Stoffregen, Hauptmann Erich **42**, 42
Stöhr, Oberleutnant Edwin 80
Stremilteny (Soviet destroyer) 35
Stumpff, Generaloberst Jürgen **42**
Sumpf, Oberleutnant Hans 62, 63
Svobodny (Soviet destroyer) 73

T.413 (Soviet minesweeper) 73
'taran' ramming attacks 3, 17–18, 21, 22
Tashkent (Soviet flotilla leader) 75
Tirpitz (German battleship) 36, 40
Trinidad, HMS (cruiser) 37

Ungarische Kampstaffel 'B1+47' pl**59**(94)
Unrau, Leutnant Heinz 26–7, **27**

Veshilov (Soviet tug) **71**
Victorious, HMS (aircraft carrier) 36
Vironia (Estonian steamer) 24–5
Vlassov, Senior Lieutenant 17–18
Voroshilov (Soviet cruiser) 28
Voss, Major Herbert 83
Vtaraya Piatiletka (Soviet transport) 25

Washington (US freighter) 41
Weinreich, Oberleutnant Helmut **46**
Wekusta Staffeln: 1/Ob.d.L, 'D7+BH' **49**; 76 '5Z+GA' pl**58**(94)
Wenchowski, Oberleutnant von 11
Widmann, Hauptmann Hans 30
Winter, Feldwebel 26
Wölfing, Hauptmann Wilhelm 84

Zaafaran (Dutch rescue ship) 41